

“America Would Lose Its Soul”: The Immigration
Restriction Debate, 1920-1924

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Between 1830 and 1924, over 35 million immigrants arrived to the United States from Europe. This so-called “century of immigration” ended rather abruptly in the early 1920s, when the United States enacted what became known as the Quota Acts, that significantly limited immigration from Europe. The first of these acts, passed in 1921, introduced quotas for all European immigrants, cutting the total to about 350,000 European immigrants per year. This temporary legislation was superseded by the Immigration Act of 1924, which not only made the quotas stricter but also calculated them in a manner designed to favor Northern and Western European immigrants. It also altogether barred immigration from Japan.

With this legislation, a fundamental American policy was turned on its head. Until the late 19th century, the United States had had a strong commitment, on both economic and ideological grounds, to free immigration. Economically, immigrants were seen as not only a boon but a necessity; ideologically, they strengthened the image of America as a land of opportunity composed of the most enterprising elements of all European nations. As early as 1782, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, himself a French immigrant, had famously declared that

He is an American who, leaving behind him all ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the government he obeys, and the new rank he holds [...] Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.¹

This idea of American identity as a matter of choice and action, and American nationality as a blend of the best from all peoples, persisted throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th as well. There was, however, an underlying assumption that the “blend” would be composed of white newcomers: naturalization was not granted to non-whites.²

Accordingly, when concern about the benefits of immigration began to spread in the late 19th century, the first to feel the changing winds of policy were the Chinese, whose entry was prohibited in 1882; in 1917, the creation of an “Asian Barred Zone” prevented the admittance of all Asians except the Japanese, whose immigration was regulated through diplomatic means.

The first serious proposals to limit European immigration came in the 1890s, a time of serious economic depression and general unease about the future of the country, and also a time when the shift in the sources of immigration from Northern and Western Europe to Southern and Eastern Europe began to be apparent. This shift, combined with economic problems, disturbed many observers, but was especially unsettling to the old-stock New Englanders who saw their cities increasingly populated by immigrants who seemed to them ignorant and utterly alien. One of these patricians, the Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge, in 1891 put forth a bill to impose a literacy test on all immigrants.

Between that initial proposal of the literacy test and its final enactment

¹Quoted in Gerstle, *Liberty*, p. 524; emphasis in original.

²After 1870, persons of African descent could be naturalized, but the assumption was that their numbers would be so small as to be practically non-existent. See section 3.2.1 and Ngai, *Architecture*.

in the Immigration Act of 1917, the attitude toward immigrants swung from fear to confidence and back again. Faith in the immigrants' assimilation alternated with suspicions concerning their loyalty to America and their willingness to adopt an American lifestyle. Belief in the economic benefits of immigration occasionally outweighed and occasionally was submerged by belief in their adverse impact on the society as a whole. The Americanization movement, a systematic attempt at immigrant assimilation that began around 1907 and reached its height in 1919, was one response to the conflict of economic benefits and cultural threat. At the same time, however, various versions of the literacy test were repeatedly introduced in Congress, indicating the persistence of the idea; moreover, a favorable attitude to limiting immigration was beginning to take hold even in the traditionally immigrant-hungry areas of the South and the West.

The Quota Acts, then, were preceded by a lengthy if erratic growth of restrictionist sentiment. Nevertheless, in both form and scale they represented a radical departure from earlier ideas: all previous regulations of European immigration had concerned the individual characteristics of the immigrant, and never before had the number of entries per year been dictated by law. The turn of the tide was remarkably complete: by the last stages of the Congressional debate there were few groups in America (apart from immigrants themselves) that raised voices of serious opposition. Even those who wished for a different kind of law often conceded that restriction in some form was necessary.

A variety of factors combined to bring about this consensus regarding the need to drastically curb immigration. Probably the most striking feature of the support for restriction is the diversity of its sources: patrician New Englanders, labor unionists, Republicans, Democrats, black leaders, Klans-

men, industrialists and eugenisists all seemed to expect some benefit from limiting the influx of newcomers. All of these groups emphasized different aspects of the question: eugenists felt that America's racial and biological composition—and therefore the country's future—were at risk; labor unionists blamed the immigrant for bringing down wages; the elites said that immigrants of lower-class and culturally alien backgrounds would destroy American institutions and culture. In other words, immigration restriction could be supported on such diverse grounds that a group which might find some aspect of the law less than perfect or even distasteful often had reason to commend its other features. Industrialists, for example, would have preferred more flexibility, but often agreed that restriction nevertheless was a good thing; similarly, black leaders condemned the racist implications of the act but felt that a smaller labor pool would certainly be desirable.

The debate over the Quota Acts moved largely on the level of ideology and emotion: advocates of restriction emphasized the need to preserve American culture and national unity, while opponents appealed to traditional ideals which painted America as the haven for all those “huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” as the poem engraved on the Statue of Liberty loftily declared. Nevertheless, a number of more tangible factors contributed to the passage of immigration restriction.

By the 1920s, the demand for agricultural settlers and unskilled industrial labor, which had largely been the driving force of immigration, had decreased dramatically. The frontier was now closed, agriculture suffered from overproduction, and major labor-intensive infrastructural projects had been completed. Technological innovations and better communications had created an industrial society that increasingly relied on machines rather than men to do the work. The First World War, by practically closing off

European immigration, had accelerated the focus on capital-intensive production; and, it had drawn Southern blacks to industrial jobs in the North, making manufacturers aware of a domestic labor pool that could supplant immigrants. A comparison with other countries of high immigration—such as Canada, Australia and Argentina—underlines the importance of long-term economic factors in producing a restriction-friendly climate: while all of these countries expressed concern about the immigrants' impact on society, none of them enacted restrictions as strict as those in the United States, probably because of their greater need for agricultural and industrial labor.

Economic factors, mechanization, and falling farm prices were occasionally noted in the debate, but they were clearly not the main issue: any economic argument for immigration, for example, could be immediately dispelled by warning that continued immigration would change America so fundamentally that no economic profit could compensate for the loss. The most consistent arguments of the restrictionists focused on the size and character of immigration. Such huge numbers of Europeans, they claimed, wanted to escape the war-weary continent that the impact on the American economy and American culture would be intolerable. They also argued that the quality of immigrants had deteriorated—that the new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were racially and culturally inferior to the Western and Northern Europeans that had constituted the bulk of immigrants up to about 1890.

Intense concern over the fate of the nation, and over change itself, surrounded the debate on immigration restriction. This led many contemporary observers to argue that restrictionism was simply one more manifestation of the same impulse that passed the Prohibition Amendment, condemned short skirts, sang the praises of rural America, and advocated a return to

“old-time religion.” This impulse, said writers like H.L. Mencken and Walter Lippman, was simply the dying gasp of traditional, rural, Victorian America, trying to stave off the inevitable arrival of modernity.

The debate on the Quota Acts certainly lends some support to this view: congressmen, journalists, and social scientists over and over again repeated that it was time for America to stop and catch its breath, to “take stock” of its population, to devise an immigration policy that would prevent America from “losing its soul” and becoming “de-Americanized.” In other words, there was clearly a widespread sentiment that the pace of change was too rapid, and that immigrants were at least partly responsible for this.

But immigration restriction was in many senses as much a part of “modernity” as it was a reaction against it. First of all, the Immigration Act of 1924 established an intricate bureaucracy for consular inspection of prospective immigrants. Second, many of the advocates—especially eugenicists, New England elites, and some congressmen—placed great weight on the argument that America needed a “scientific” and efficient immigration policy, and that this was exactly what the new legislation would provide. Third, the underpinnings of the quota system lay in eugenics, which drew the greater part of its impetus from an interpretation of Darwin’s theory of evolution and natural selection.

All of these three aspects indicate that the law’s designers were not so much trying to recreate an earlier, simpler era as they were determined to define and fashion an acceptable modern one. They had few qualms about new scientific theories, no matter how seriously those theories might undermine traditional interpretations of the world (after all, the issue of Darwinian evolution versus a literal interpretation of the biblical account of creation has often been cited as one of the major controversies of the

twenties). And, while they praised the virtues of simple farm and village life, they also implicitly accepted that America had become a modern, complex society that could not function without a certain amount of efficient state bureaucracy.

In the debate over the first Quota Act, many opponents still argued that no new restrictions were necessary and the rumors of an immigrant “flood” were greatly exaggerated. The temporary nature of the first Act, however, probably eased its passage, and by 1924, there was fairly strong consensus over the need for a permanent and restrictive immigration policy. The controversy in 1924 arose mainly from the proposed form of restrictions: the quotas that discriminated against Southern and Eastern Europeans and the exclusion of Japanese immigrants spurred heated debate. Recent research, too, has emphasized the racist ideology behind the 1924 Act and the support it received from contemporary race-thinkers and eugenists.³

The influence of eugenics certainly was important and the prejudices embedded in the Act are not in doubt. But while racism may have been sufficient to shut out Japanese immigrants, it hardly suffices to explain the drive against Europeans. The way in which congressmen spoke about Japanese exclusion was very different from the way they discussed the relative merits of European nationalities. The alleged racial inferiority of Southern and Eastern Europeans remained controversial throughout the debate, and the racial case against them never fully distinguished itself from arguments based on economic or cultural aspects. By contrast, the racial otherness of the Japanese and their consequent undesirability as citizens was treated as a self-evident fact, one that did not require further argumentation. This view was not contested even by those who most eloquently denounced the at-

³See e.g. King, *Making Americans*; Ngai, *Architecture*.

tempt to put Europeans into separate racial categories, and consequently the discussion on Japanese exclusion centered on the correct legislative or diplomatic way to accomplish it.

Popular stereotypes did much to buttress the “scientific” racism directed at Europeans, although—as many opponents of restriction pointed out—the claim that the newest arrivals were inferior to those who came before had been advanced over and over again in the nation’s history. What distinguished the 1920s from earlier eras was the relative absence of strong opposition to restriction. Especially industry, which in earlier times had insisted on substantial immigrant labor, was no longer united on the question. Another important factor in creating the consensus against immigrants was the prevailing spirit of “Americanism.” More popular than the racist view of European immigrants, Americanism (and its flip side, un-Americanism) functioned as a catch-all concept that could always be evoked against foreigners—and against American dissenters. Through declarations of Americanism and accusations of un-Americanism, anti-immigrant agitation also contributed to the control of the domestic population, both by declaring activities such as labor organizing (especially in its more radical variants) “un-American” and alien in origin, and by shifting the blame for various social problems from politicians or businessmen to the immigrants.

Immigration restriction, then, resonated with Americans for many reasons. The conditions that had made immigration essential—a need for agricultural settlers and unskilled labor—had been replaced by an increasingly urban, mechanized society. Intense nationalism, buttressed by wartime propaganda, created an atmosphere that was distrustful of everything foreign, and many things domestic. The propensity of new immigrants to stay in cities not only made them more conspicuous but also underscored the ur-

banization of America—and made both the immigrant and the big city seem perhaps even more alien to many Southern and Western Americans. Various new theories seemed to confirm the popular ideas that Southern and Eastern Europeans were different, inferior, and unassimilable. In the public mind, immigrants were also associated with radicalism and Bolshevism, and in the anti-union climate after the Red Scare, this probably did as much to discredit them as their strange customs and languages. And finally, immigration restriction provided many groups and politicians with a clear-cut, concrete issue that could, after all, be fairly simply solved.

In examining the debate surrounding the Quota Acts, I have focused mostly on the Congressional discussions, the views of those who appeared before the House or Senate Committees on Immigration, and the writings of major eugenists of the time. Using the Congressional debates as research material is, of course, wrought with a number of problems: much that was said may have been directed more to the voting public or the congressman's constituency rather than for the benefit of his fellow members of Congress. Nearly certainly, too, many congressmen downplayed their prejudices, preferring to draw attention to their lofty sentiments about American ideals and pay lip service to their concern for the American working man. And indeed, an examination of the popular magazines and publications of popular organizations tends to show much more forthright and unabashed variety of anti-immigrant sentiment, and two issues that rarely entered the Congressional debate, anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism, probably nevertheless played a major role in creating popular support for the Quota Acts. But as those who sat in Congress and those who consulted them and wrote scientific and semi-scientific works on the subject of immigration certainly had more

power to influence the final form of the law, I feel justified in focusing more on them. For the same reason, and because of their significant majority, the arguments and people in favor of the law receive the bulk of attention here, and the opposing side is only examined inasmuch as it is necessary to unfold the restrictionist case.

Another problem connected with focusing on the Congressional debate, or indeed on any short-term debate, is that many underlying and perhaps extremely influential issues are never discussed as the participants prefer to score easier rhetorical points. Therefore, to provide a background and a context for the Quota Acts debate, I have used secondary sources to try to examine both the immigration laws of other countries and American domestic developments at some length.

Chapter 2

Background

Although the Quota Acts of the 1920s can be described as the end of an era, this does not mean that nativist sentiment was a product of the twenties or even that its appearance on the scene of national politics was by any means sudden. As John Higham has shown, nativist sentiment had deep roots in American society, dating back to the earliest days of the republic. Hostility to foreigners has usually flared up in economically and/or politically insecure times, and has often served to deflect the potential for class conflict inherent in them to the less disruptive goal of diminishing the rights of the immigrant.

2.1 Immigration to the United States

At the time of the first census in 1790, the white population was predominantly of English origin. Sixty percent of the white residents of the continental United States came from England; about eight percent came from Scotland. Other white national or linguistic stocks consisted of Irish (9.5 percent), German (8.6 percent) and Dutch (3.1 percent); Swedish and Spanish persons comprised less than one percent each and 6.8 percent were not classified. About 20 percent of the population were of African origin. Many

of the European groups were concentrated in particular areas, so that a third of Pennsylvania's population, for instance, was German, and a sixth of New York and New Jersey was Dutch in origin.¹

Between 1820 and 1924 the influx of immigrants grew steadily, with the exceptions of the Civil War period, the depression of the 1890s, and the years of the First World War. The earliest arrivals of this "century of immigration" were Irish, German and Scandinavian; the Irish comprised well over thirty percent of immigrants up to 1860, while the Germans totaled about 25–35 percent between 1830 and 1890.² Scandinavians, of course, never reached the numbers that Germans or Irish did, although in proportion to the population of the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) their migration was in fact greater than that of the Germans. A total of 2.1 million Scandinavians arrived in the U.S. between 1820 and 1920; the bulk of this movement occurred between 1865 and 1910.³

After about 1880, the numbers of Southern and Eastern European immigrants began to increase dramatically. Only ca. 55,000 Italians, for example, had arrived in the 1870s, while in the 1880s they totaled over 300,000. Between 1880 and 1920, over four million Italians arrived in the United States. Other prominent groups from the Mediterranean were the Greeks, the Turks (about 300,000 each) and the Armenians (about 100,000). Data on East European arrivals are more difficult to interpret because ethnic groups and national boundaries, as they were perceived, rarely coincided. Russia and Austria-Hungary sent over three million immigrants to the U.S. between 1901 and 1910, but Americans (and the immigrants themselves) spoke of

¹Daniels, *Coming*, pp. 66–68.

²Daniels, *Coming*, tables on pages 129 and 146. The Irish immigration continued to comprise over 10 percent of the total until 1900; Germans still held 13.7 percent of the total in 1901–1910, after which their share dropped to low single digits.

³Daniels, *Coming*, pp. 164–165.

Magyars, Slovaks, Poles and Jews. Statistics of the mother tongue of first and second generation immigrants in the 1910 census showed about 1.7 million Polish speakers; about half a million Magyars arrived between 1890 and 1914; and an estimated three million Eastern European Jews were in the U.S. in 1924.⁴

Immigration from England and Scotland continued throughout this period, although it received little attention; English immigrants were considered easily assimilable and aroused little opposition or interest. English and Scottish immigrants were also fewer than either Irish or German immigrants: between 1820 and 1951, about 3.5 million English and Scottish immigrants arrived in the U.S., as opposed to about 4.6 million Irish and 6.3 million Germans. By the late 19th century, the numbers of English immigrants (and of other Western European immigrants as well) were decreasing, and the quota allotted to Great Britain in the Immigration Act of 1924 was in fact larger than the number of would-be British immigrants.⁵

Over 90 percent of the immigrants who arrived during the century of immigration were Europeans, and much of the history of immigration to the U.S., until quite recently, has focused almost exclusively on European arrivals. But the slave trade, of course, brought a significant number of Africans to the United States. There were, too, arrivals from Asia and the Western Hemisphere; these immigrants (especially Asians) tended to be concentrated in very few states, making them conspicuous despite relatively small numbers.⁶

Chinese immigration began roughly with the California gold rush in 1849, and between that time and the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion

⁴Daniels, *Coming*, pp. 188–189, 202–206, 216–233.

⁵Taft and Robbins, *International Migrations*, pp. 390, 416–417.

⁶Daniels, *Coming*, p. 238.

Act in 1882 about 300,000 Chinese entered the United States. There were, however, probably a great number of repeated entries; the census of 1880 showed about 105,000 Chinese living in the United States.⁷ Of these, over two thirds lived in California; only three percent lived outside the Western states or territories.⁸

Like the Chinese, Japanese immigrants were heavily concentrated in the West, especially the Pacific Coast. The Japanese began arriving to the mainland U.S. in significant numbers in the 1890s, both directly from Japan and from Hawaii (which the U.S. annexed in 1898 and where about 30,000 Japanese had been employed on plantations). The census of 1920 showed about 110,000 Japanese in the contiguous United States; of these, 85 percent lived on the Pacific Coast.⁹

Statistics relative to immigration from the Western Hemisphere are much less reliable than those regarding European and Asian entrants: crossing the land border was, obviously, much simpler than undertaking a long sea voyage, and controls were lax: for example, there was no Border Patrol on the Mexican border until 1924. Still, about 720,000 Mexicans were counted as entering between the Mexican Revolution of 1909 and 1930, roughly tripling the number of foreign-born Mexican Americans. Most Mexicans stayed in the Southwest as agricultural laborers, although the First World War and the subsequent restrictions on European immigration also drew significant numbers to industrial jobs in the North.¹⁰

⁷“Chinese” was a racial category and included both the foreign-born and their descendants.

⁸Daniels, *Coming*, pp. 239–241.

⁹“Japanese,” too, was a racial classification and included both immigrants and those born in the United States. Daniels, *Coming*, pp. 250–251.

¹⁰Daniels, *Coming*, pp. 309–310. It should be noted that many Mexican Americans were not immigrants, but had remained in the areas annexed by the United States after Mexican-American War in 1846–1847. Also, although Mexicans composed well over half of the immigrants from southern Western Hemisphere, immigrants from West Indies totaled about 400,000 between 1820 and 1930, and there were also immigrants from Central and

An immigrant group from north of the border, French Canadians, were almost as numerous as the Mexicans; like the Mexicans, they too stayed fairly close to the border, settling in the New England states. Again, statistics are unreliable, but the census figures show that in 1890 there were about 520,000 French Canadians (first and second generation) in the U.S.; by 1920 this figure had increased to almost 850,000. Most of these immigrants came to work in the growing industries of the New England states, and their acculturation was fairly slow due to both the steady pace of migration and the ease of visiting their homeland. This provoked considerable resentment among the native American population. The French Canadians, like the Chinese, were often seen as sojourners who had no intention of becoming “true” Americans.¹¹

2.2 Anti-Immigrant Sentiment before the 1890s

One of the earliest attempts to incorporate nativist sentiment into the legislative body came in 1798 in the form of the Alien and Sedition Acts, which were a response to the unease caused by the French Revolution. The Acts “were intended to make citizenship more difficult, create an alien registration system, give the President the power to order the apprehension and deportation of aliens, and criminalize a broad range of expression opposed to the U.S. government.” There was substantial opposition to these laws, and no immigrant was in fact deported under the Alien Act, which was allowed to expire in 1800.¹²

The fear of revolutionary forces that motivated the Alien and Sedition Acts may seem incongruous; after all, the United States itself had only

South America.

¹¹Daniels, *Coming*, pp.258–260.

¹²Hong, *Origin*, pp. 3-4.

recently come into being through revolution. However, as John Higham puts it, “[i]n retrospect, the spirit of ’76 could appear even more sober than it was, and vastly different from the temper of *foreign* revolutions.”¹³ Far from dying with the expiration of the Alien Act, this fear of revolution (and of radicalism in general) would continue to influence immigration policy for decades—indeed, centuries—to come.

The next wave of nativism appeared in the 1830s, this time directed not at radicals but at Catholics. Anti-Catholicism had been a feature of American society since colonial times, and as increasing numbers of Irish and German Catholics entered the country from the 1820s onward, it was transformed from “largely rhetorical” to “a major social and political force.”¹⁴ The Catholic Church seemed “dangerously un-American”¹⁵ in its authoritarian structures, Catholic immigrants were seen as bowing to a foreign power, and Catholicism in general brought to disrepute by popular “exposés” of the immoral proceedings taking place in convents.¹⁶

Anti-Catholicism was strongly connected to the temperance movement, since Catholic immigrants—coming from cultures where the saloon or the beer garden was much more of a conventional social gathering place than in America—were among the most vigorous opponents of anti-liquor laws. Moreover, it was also tied to general dissatisfaction at immigrants’ political

¹³Higham, *Strangers*, p. 7, emphasis in original.

¹⁴Daniels, *Coming*, p. 267.

¹⁵Higham, *Strangers*, p. 6.

¹⁶Higham, *Strangers*; Anbinder, *Ideology*. The most prominent of these exposés was Maria Monk’s *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*, published in 1836 and widely read; the publication of a sequel (*Further Disclosures*) indicates the book’s popularity. Monk claimed that during the time she had lived at the convent she had been sexually taken advantage of, and that when she became pregnant she had decided to flee to avoid having her child killed by the priests (according to her, a standard practice at the convent). Her “evidence” was discredited fairly soon, however, once it became clear that she had in fact never stayed at a convent, and especially once she became pregnant again. (Monk, 1998); (Daniels, 1990).

power and allegations of corruption and machine politics.¹⁷ Anti-Catholic sentiment was especially violent in the eastern cities, and drew much of its support from the working class, incited to fear and hatred by church leaders and street-corner orators. In the 1850s, the anti-foreign and anti-Catholic American Party (aka the Know-Nothing Party) reached its climax through populist condemnations of politicians and calls for national unity, spiced with the many-faceted accusations leveled at Catholics.¹⁸ The Know-Nothing party eventually dissolved as a result of internal conflicts; there is, however, evidence that the Republican party, which emerged in this period, inherited a significant number of Know-Nothing supporters.

While the specifics of the connections between nativism and antebellum Republican politics are somewhat controversial, it is fairly well established that nativism as a political force was significant enough to require Republicans to take it into account in devising electoral strategy. Especially at the state level, concessions were made to nativist opinion, partly because of ideological similarities between Republicans and nativists and partly because of political expediency.¹⁹ Neither the Know-Nothing anti-immigrant agitation or the Republicans' concessions to nativism, however, led to significant legislation regarding immigration, and the force of the nativist movement declined after 1856.²⁰

¹⁷Foner, *Free Soil*; Boyer, *Urban Masses*.

¹⁸Anbinder, *Ideology*; Higham, *Strangers*; Daniels, *Coming*.

¹⁹Gienapp, *Nativism*. Gienapp also points out that while nativist agitation was not entirely limited to Catholics during this period, the Republican party focused on anti-Catholicism in its nativist planks, because it feared that blanket condemnations of foreigners might drive away the immigrant support it had managed to attract. Many Protestant immigrants, however, shared the natives' fear of Catholics, and as Catholic immigrants were unlikely to leave the Democratic party in any case, anti-Catholicism was a "safe" way to attract nativist support.

²⁰The Know-Nothings focused on tightening naturalization laws, not on restricting entry. There are, however, indications that the violence of the anti-Catholic movement led to a reduction in immigration from Catholic countries as prospective emigrants heard about the unwelcoming atmosphere in the U.S; see Cohn, *Nativism*. In addition, Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law* has argued that there was significant popular demand for restriction.

Anti-Catholicism did not disappear, but the question of immigration was subsumed in the much more pressing issues of the Civil War, and the following years of expansion did not provide much breeding ground for nativism. By the late 1870s, however, the gradual decrease in the employment rate and in the supply of available land once again focused attention on foreigners—this time the Chinese. The two major complaints against the Chinese were that they were “by nature, disposition and habits incapable of assimilating with” American laws and customs and that they came as contract laborers, thereby decreasing the opportunities available to American workers. Another prominent argument in anti-Chinese agitation was that Chinese women were being imported to work as prostitutes.²¹

The vast majority of Chinese immigrants resided on the West Coast, mainly in California, and the exclusion movement was originally strongest among the white workers of that region who saw the Chinese as unfair competition (Chinese contract labor was often used as a device to undermine union power and to break strikes).²² The workers received support from Southern congressmen, who, while not usually favorably disposed toward unions, were willing to support exclusion because of racial considerations. Moreover, some Californian capitalists, faced with competition from Chinese manufacturing firms, were themselves becoming favorably disposed toward exclusion.²³ As a result, the Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese laborers for ten years and made the Chinese explicitly ineligible for citizenship (the Act was later extended indefinitely and amended to include all Chinese persons).²⁴

Chinese exclusion, and the later anti-Japanese agitation, often appear as

²¹Hutchinson, *Legislative*, p. 68; Takaki, *Strangers*; Cox, *Anti-Asiatic Movement*.

²²Rudolph, *Chinamen*.

²³Cox, *Anti-Asiatic Movement*; Berthoff, *Southern Attitudes*; Rudolph, *Chinamen*.

²⁴Hutchinson, *Legislative*.

side notes or separate entities in general nativist thought, because the question of race was so prominent in opposition to Asian immigrants. However, while contemporaries certainly differentiated between Asian and European immigrants, the underpinnings of the exclusion debate were surprisingly similar to the later discussions on restricting European immigration. Concerns over assimilability, which were to be so prominent in regard to Southern and Eastern Europeans from 1890s onward, were also significant in the debate over Chinese immigrants (although the emphasis on race was much stronger in relation to the Chinese). Moreover, the Chinese debate also exhibited another common feature of nativism: the exaggeration of a “foreign threat” to suppress domestic conflicts: in 1880, the Chinese constituted .002 percent of the U.S. population, which makes the prominence of the agitation as well as the drastic legislation it achieved seem rather out of proportion. The fundamental issues went deeper than the presence of Chinese; according to Takaki, Chinese exclusion represented an attempt to “defuse an issue agitating white workers” and alleviate the “larger conflict between white labor and white capital.”²⁵

By the 1880s, then, the major elements of nativist thought—fear of foreign influence, anti-radicalism, and racism—were fairly well established in the public mind, and the arguments used by 19th-century nativists (e.g. that the quality of immigrants had deteriorated) were to be replayed again and again. However, widespread sentiment in favor of general immigration restriction was not evident during this period, and the regulative actions taken by the federal government concerned specific classes of “undesirables,” such as paupers and criminals, or were directed at ensuring the welfare of the

²⁵Takaki, *Strangers*, pp. 110-111.

immigrant.²⁶ Perhaps foreshadowing the later significance that race, as well as the use of racial friction to control labor, would acquire in immigration law, the major exception to the individual selection principle was the Chinese Exclusion Law.

2.3 The Rise of Restrictionism

From the mid-1880s to the late 1890s, the United States was faced with severe bouts of depression and accompanying episodes of industrial unrest.²⁷ Once again, this uncertain atmosphere not only fed nativist fears, but also made them more appealing to the general public. The economic distress of this period coincided with other factors, such as the growth of cities (and their slum districts) and a change in the sources of immigration, which further exacerbated xenophobic tendencies.

Anti-foreign sentiment in the 1890s made use of familiar arguments, once more seeking explanations for the nation's problems in alien influence. Catholics again came under attack, and the membership of the American Protective Association (APA), a popular anti-Catholic group, rose to its height in 1893–1894.²⁸ There were, however, new elements in the debate as well: unlike their earlier counterparts, the nativists in this era were beginning to voice intensive demands for actual restriction of the total immigration. By 1895, over 100 nativist journals were being published in cities from Washington D.C. to Minneapolis to San Francisco; these journals accused

²⁶Hutchinson, *Legislative*.

²⁷See e.g. Higham, *Strangers*. It should perhaps be noted that the industrial unrest of this period was not simply a question of wages, hours, etc., but involved, if not always directly, fundamental questions about the roles of workers and owners in a business. Unions were growing, even if the percentage of organized workers was not high; moreover the view that wage labor as a permanent condition (as opposed to artisanry or farming) was not worthy of a self-respecting man had not yet died out—making the question of industrial relations a complicated and explosive one; see e.g. Dubofsky, *State and Labor*.

²⁸Daniels, *Coming*, p. 275.

the immigrant of taking jobs from Americans, bowing to Rome, and disrupting the life of the nation in general by his immoral and drunken ways. The spread of this “immigration disease,” the journals said, could only be stopped by stopping immigration.²⁹

As indicated by the geographical spread of these journals, by this time even the traditionally immigrant-hungry regions of the South and the West were beginning to reconsider their stand on restriction. Chinese exclusion had not ended the employment problems in the West, and European foreigners, too, began to seem threatening. In the South, there had long existed two opposing views on immigrants: while the industrialists and plantation-owners wished to encourage immigration, the popular attitude toward outsiders was consistently one of suspicion. On the other hand, even those who recruited immigrants for business reasons were by no means immune to prejudice against them. In the economically arduous 1890s, suspicion gained the upper hand, and by 1896 the majority of Southern congressmen had begun to favor restriction.³⁰

Adding to the economic anguish was concern over changes in the American landscape, especially over the growth—both in size and in influence—of cities. Urbanization had long seemed an ominous and sinister process to Americans, and as cities grew, so did the feeling that they would utterly change, or even ruin, American society. One of the best-known expressions of such fears is Josiah Strong’s bestselling *Our Country*, which warned that the city was “multiplying and focalizing the elements of anarchy and destruction.”³¹ Strong’s fears were shared by many, and by the 1890s there was a keen sense that the “better elements” should take up the challenge

²⁹Streitmatter, *Nativist Press*.

³⁰Berthoff, *Southern Attitudes*; Higham, *Strangers*, p. 74.

³¹Quoted in Boyer, *Urban Masses*, p. 131.

and act in concert to avert the looming disaster.³²

The proposed strategies of urban reform varied from the City Beautiful movement to programs of moral policing. Most relevant for immigration restriction, however, were the ideas of civic duty gaining currency among the Boston Brahmin, who were increasingly aware that the immigrant population of their city had come to outnumber the native-born population by a wide margin.³³ Moreover, the immigrants themselves weren't the same as earlier; the proportion of Southern and Eastern Europeans was rapidly exceeding that of Northern and Western Europeans. These "new immigrants" were seen as less assimilable than the "old" immigrants, and combined with the already existing urban squalor they provoked fears that Old World's rigid social divisions would be recreated in America.

2.3.1 "Wild Motley Throng": The New Immigrants and the Growth of Race-Thinking

The origins of the racial theories regarding Europeans lay in what Higham calls the Anglo-Saxon nativist tradition, which held that Europeans of English or generally North European origin were the group that embodied the best of the white race. This tradition was originally both vague and optimistic, and emphasized the capacity of the Anglo-Saxons to assimilate other races as one of their greatest strengths. In the late 19th century, however, this confident outlook began to change.

In *Ancestors and Immigrants*, historian Barbara Solomon examines the development of anti-immigrant sentiment among patrician New Englanders, and argues that the intellectual basis of the immigration restriction movement can be found in the civic consciousness that developed among upper-

³²Boyer, *Urban Masses*, pp. 175-179; see also Solomon, *Ancestors*; Higham, *Strangers*.

³³Solomon, *Ancestors*.

class Bostonians in the 1880s. This civic consciousness was part of the general interest in urban reform among the middle and upper classes, and sprang from the distaste engendered by municipal corruption and the perception that the educated class, instead of functioning as an example for others, was relinquishing the political field to ignorant laborers and foreigners.³⁴ Several clubs were founded to bring the “better element” back to community affairs, and the education of the younger generation became “a watchword in the cause of good citizenship.”³⁵

One of the main havens of this new education that emphasized the public responsibilities of the upper classes was Harvard College, where several members of the faculty focused on instilling a sense of civic duty in their students. As one of the motives behind the emphasis on the political engagement of the upper classes was the perpetuation of the “ancestral,” Anglo-Saxon tradition, immigration was an important question to consider. Many of the clubs founded in the 1880s dealt with the problem of immigration (some, like the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Good Citizenship, had also engaged in immigrant education) while history and English discussion classes at Harvard also took up the issue. Solomon notes that while most such classes represented the foreign-born as a societal blight, throughout the 1880s they still displayed a fundamental faith in the powers of assimilation. The restrictionist case did, however, gradually receive more attention.³⁶

The actual restrictionist impulse arose in the younger generation—the students who attended these classes. Their parents and professors had always seen immigration as the foundation of economic prosperity, and so had

³⁴Solomon notes that “the withdrawal of the upper class from political affairs was so noticeable that Henry Cabot Lodge’s entrance into the political arena in 1882 evoked public praise.” Solomon, *Ancestors*, pp. 83-84.

³⁵Solomon, *Ancestors*, p. 89.

³⁶Solomon, *Ancestors*.

Table 2.1: Immigrants by Region of Last Residence, 1820-1920 (percentages)
(Daniels, *Coming*, p. 122)

	1820–60	1861–1900	1900–20
Northwestern Europe	95	68	41
Southeastern Europe	—	22	44
North America	3	7	6
Asia	—	2	4
Latin America	—	—	4
Other	2	1	1

been reluctant to support strict restrictions regardless of their personal distaste toward the immigrant. The students, however, were less convinced of the material necessity of immigration, and closing the gates seemed to them the natural way to protect America from the problems associated with immigrants. As the economic hard times of the 1890s brought the problem of immigration to the forefront once more, three Harvard graduates of the class of 1889 “resolved to save the nation by preventing any further inroads upon Anglo-Saxon America by strangers.” To accomplish this, in 1894 they organized the Immigration Restriction League, which rapidly became active in immigration policy, and remained so until the passing of the quota laws.³⁷

As some observers had already noted, the sources of immigration were changing. This change had begun around the early 1880s, and became dramatic in the early 20th century: while most of the immigrants had traditionally come from Northern and Western Europe, by the turn of the century the numbers of Southern and Eastern Europeans were surpassing the old immigration (see table 2.1).

Many Americans considered Southern and Eastern Europeans inferior to

³⁷Solomon, *Ancestors*, p. 102. It should, of course, be noted that anti-immigrant sentiment was by no means the consensus at Harvard; in fact, only a handful of students joined the Immigration Restriction League. However, as the few that joined were both zealous and influential, in time the League became a formidable force in politics. Solomon, *Ancestors*; Higham, *Strangers*.

Anglo-Saxons, and as their numbers increased, doubts arose about the functioning of the assimilative process. Though immigrants had traditionally been considered a necessary labor addition to a growing economy, new theories proposed that immigration had in fact not meant a population increase but a population replacement—in other words, had foreign immigration not existed, the native population would have procreated more. For evidence, the theories pointed to the decline in the native birth rate, especially in regions where large numbers of immigrants lived. Social scientist claimed that the new immigration, in particular, bore responsibility for this drop in birth rate: because the newcomers had “a poorer standard of living” and “habits repellent to our native people,” Americans were discouraged from reproducing, as their children would have to compete “with those whom they did not recognize as their own grade and station.”³⁸

In the 1890s, however, relatively few people were concerned about the change in the immigrant stream. According to Higham, “[t]he rising flood of popular xenophobia drew much more upon conventional anti-foreign ideas” and fears of Anglo-Saxon demise were still largely confined to patrician circles. In the opening years of the twentieth century, the public found these fears even less relevant, as imperialism once more boosted the faith in assimilation.³⁹

However, the happily imperialistic mood did not long survive the complications of expansion. At the same time, the patrician race-thinkers were finding new sources of scientific support for their fears. Especially important was the eugenics movement, launched in Britain by the Darwinian scientist Sir Francis Galton. Galton drew upon the work of Gregor Mendel on inheri-

³⁸Francis A. Walker, 1899, quoted in Hawes, *Social Scientists*, p. 470; see also Ludmerer, *Genetics*; Fairchild, *Paradox*.

³⁹Higham, *Strangers*, pp. 139, 144–145.

tance of traits as well as on August Weismann's theory of germinal continuity to support his own research on heredity, and started "an active propaganda" to promote his conviction that "the betterment of society depends largely on improvement of the 'inborn qualities' of 'the human breed.'" This, of course, was of obvious interest to nativists in the United States, since it stipulated that if the country were to admit lower "raw material," its institutions and its very nature would inevitably degenerate. The upper-class Bostonians—the founders of the Immigration Restriction League—found the message of eugenics alluring, in particular: besides appealing to their sense of inherent superiority, it also provided fresh arguments against immigration.⁴⁰

Racial attitudes were, then, becoming increasingly significant in relation to European immigrants. American social science soon began to incorporate the new hereditary theories in its research, and the eugenics movement became established in the U.S. as well as in Europe. "Preserving the American race" became a new and important slogan for restrictionists, and the method of restriction they recommended—the literacy test—was ideologically well adapted to address their two major concerns, the racial purity and intellectual composition of America. Verifying that the immigrant could read provided at least some guarantee of his mental powers, and as statistics indicated Southern and Eastern Europeans to have fairly low literacy rates, the test would effectively enforce the Anglo-Saxon preference of the restrictionists.⁴¹

The idea of a literacy test was first introduced in a series of lectures by the economist Edward Bemis in 1887, and in 1891 the Bostonian Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge took up the proposal and began to press for legislation that would ascertain the literacy of all immigrants before they

⁴⁰Higham, *Strangers*, pp. 150,152.

⁴¹See e.g. Hutchinson, *Legislative*, pp. 465-467.

were admitted. He was assisted in this effort by the Immigration Restriction League, which mounted a nationwide campaign to foster support for the test.⁴² With varying degrees of success, the literacy requirement was included as a provision in one bill after another, usually with Lodge as its leading advocate. A bill containing the provision passed for the first time in the 54th Congress (1895-1897) but was vetoed by President Cleveland. The House overrode the veto but the Senate took no action. In subsequent Congresses, the test provision was reintroduced several times, but did not make much headway in the fairly confident atmosphere of the new century; in the bill that became the 1907 Act, the literacy provision was struck out in favor of an amendment that created a commission to research the question of immigration.⁴³ This commission (usually called the Dillingham Commission after its chairman, Senator William P. Dillingham) produced a 42-volume report in 1911; its recommendations included the enactment of a literacy test. After a number of failed or vetoed attempts, the literacy test was finally introduced with the Immigration Act of 1917 over President Wilson's veto. The test excluded "all aliens over sixteen years of age, physically capable of reading, who can not read the English language, or some other language or dialect, including Hebrew or Yiddish."⁴⁴

The long history of the literacy test, and the numerous failed attempts to make it law, indicate the relative unconcern of most Americans in regard

⁴²Higham, *Strangers*.

⁴³Hutchinson, *Legislative*; Higham, *Strangers*; Hall, *Recent History*.

⁴⁴Quoted in Hutchinson, *Legislative*, p. 467. Exempted from the test were some elderly male relatives, as well as close female relatives, of resident aliens or citizens, refugees from religious persecution, returning resident aliens of five years' continuous residence who had been absent less than six months, and aliens in transit.

However, Anglo-Saxon hopes were not fulfilled as completely as they might have been had the test been instituted in the 1890s: the literacy test provision of the 1917 Act was much more lenient than the original reading and writing test, occasionally with specific language requirements, that had been the reigning proposal in the 1890s; moreover, literacy rates among Southern and Eastern Europeans had increased in the interval.

to immigration in the prewar years. According to Higham, although anxiety “crept about the fringes of American thought” at its heart was still “a supreme confidence.”⁴⁵ This was, after all, the Progressive Era, a time characterized by confidence in the power of reform to bring about a continually improving society, and most Americans were not yet willing to believe that Europeans could be inherently unassimilable. Interestingly enough, this period of confidence coincided with the high point of new immigration, lending credence to the argument that the domestic situation was generally more important in sparking anti-immigrant sentiment than was the character or behavior of immigrants. It also suggests that the racist attitude toward Southern and Eastern Europeans, often cited as a major cause of immigration restriction in the twenties, did not originate in the general public (though prejudice was certainly common and the general public probably was ready enough to be influenced by racist theories and propaganda). On the other hand, the fact that Congress did repeatedly propose and pass such a restrictive test also implies a fair degree of continuity in anti-immigrant sentiment.⁴⁶

It should be noted that, although eugenics and race-thinking were gaining credence, social scientists were far from unanimous regarding the unassimilability of the new immigrants: even as the eugenicist viewpoint was gaining acceptance, there were scientists (most notably the anthropologist Franz Boas) who conducted research that indicated the importance of environmental factors in the formation of an individual.⁴⁷ Moreover, even though the thrust of the restrictionist movement during this period came from the patri-

⁴⁵Higham, *Strangers*, p. 148.

⁴⁶Between 1897 and 1915, four bills containing the literacy provision passed the Congress but were vetoed by the president; the test was also included in many more proposed bills that did not advance or were not passed. See Hutchinson, *Legislative*, pp. 465–468.

⁴⁷Hawes, *Social Scientists*; Ludmerer, *Genetics*.

cian circles, there is no reason to assume that the the confident atmosphere reflected only in the attitudes of the “masses”: the same fluctuation between faith in the immigrants’ assimilation and fear of their foreignness existed in the patrician circles as well.⁴⁸

2.3.2 Americanization and Anti-Radicalism

As Solomon has shown, New England elites were significant in creating an intellectual and theoretical background for suspicion and fear of the immigrant. By themselves, however, they probably could not have accomplished much: as Calavita argues, if racist nativism had “been confined to these mutterings of a bitter elite from a passing era, it would probably have amounted to little more than an historical curiosity.”⁴⁹ But this was not the case: as discussed above, the elites received important support from the new theories of eugenics. In addition, a third factor, the utility of race-thinking to leading capitalists, was crucial in bringing about the influence that anti-immigrant sentiment was to wield.

Since at least the 1880s, capitalists had explained labor unrest and class cleavages by claiming that they were a product not of real injustice and dissatisfaction but of the arrival of masses of foreigners who had brought with them the social patterns of their old countries and had not adopted American ideals. The immigrant provided a useful scapegoat for social ills: if industrial conflict was not the result of prevailing conditions but of the class prejudices that the immigrant had brought with him, then there was no reason to change the way business operated.⁵⁰

The “immigrant as villain”-model was not only valuable in vitiating the

⁴⁸For an interesting study of one such case, see Szuberla, *Henry Blake Fuller*.

⁴⁹Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*, p. 105.

⁵⁰Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*; Barrett, *Americanization*; Heald, *Business Attitudes*.

grievances of *immigrant* workers: it was also extremely useful in checking the demands of native laborers. Once the perception of the immigrant as mentally inferior and subversive was firmly established in the public mind, dissent became effectively equated with disloyalty and un-Americanism. This meant that the dissatisfaction expressed by American workers could be declared the result of misleading and malicious propaganda disseminated by alien radicals.⁵¹

An important avenue for establishing the equation “alien=radical” was the Americanization movement. As the numbers of arriving immigrants grew in the early 20th century, several charitable organizations (most notably the YMCA and the settlement houses) attempted to alleviate the living conditions of the new arrivals and to facilitate their adjustment into American society. But the welfare of the immigrant was not their only concern. Assimilation was important for the society as well. The smooth functioning of factories required that workers knew enough English and were familiar enough with American customs to carry out their tasks; politically, too, a large mass of foreigners might prove dangerous for the cohesion and stability of the country.

From early on, immigrant education had a strong business component. The first of the active Americanization groups, the North American Civic League for Immigrants (NACLI), was created as a result of a conference sponsored by the YMCA, and was composed of the “more conservative economic interests,” appointing as its president W. Chauncey Brewer, later to become the executive head of the Boston Chamber of Commerce, and as its vice-president Bernard J. Rothwell, industrialist and president of the Boston Chamber of Commerce. In 1909, a New York (later New York–New Jersey)

⁵¹Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*; Carey, *Taking*.

Committee of the NACLI was established; it was composed almost exclusively of corporate executives. Among its other activities, this committee organized a number of conferences of industrialists that emphasized the role of immigrant education as both a tool for preventing social unrest and an aid in making the immigrant more valuable economically.⁵²

The Americanization movement intensified in 1912, when the Industrial Workers of the World, one of the more radical labor unions, helped organize and win a strike involving mostly foreign workers at a Lawrence, Massachusetts textile mill. The success of the strike was in large degree due to the negative publicity aroused by the violent tactics of the management and the police, which made business leaders determined to repair their tarnished public image. The NACLI, then, “moved quickly to counter the success of the strike” and promptly held a joint conference about immigration with the Boston Chamber of Commerce.⁵³ The NACLI argued that “the industrial future of the country depended largely upon the education of the adult alien workers”⁵⁴ and campaigned to enlist the various chambers of commerce in the effort to Americanize the immigrant. Two years later, the NY–NJ Committee changed its name to the Committee for Immigrants in America, reflecting its decision to enlarge the scope of the program to cover the entire nation. To accomplish this, it sought the cooperation of the Federal Bureau of Education; when the Bureau objected that it had no available funds, the Committee decided to provide both the financing and the staff, and a special Division of Immigrant Education was created within the Bureau of Education, lending authority and legitimacy to the Americanization campaign of the Committee.⁵⁵

⁵²Carey, *Taking*, pp. 40–41; Hartmann, *Movement*.

⁵³Carey, *Taking*, p. 43.

⁵⁴Carey, *Taking*, p. 44.

⁵⁵Carey, *Taking*; Hartmann, *Movement*.

In addition to the corporate nature of the Americanization associations, many individual businesses also conducted their own Americanization programs. The most ambitious (and probably the most famous) of these was the one at Ford's Highland Park Model T plant. Ford's Americanization plan was part of the Five Dollar Day program, which "combined assembly-line technology with a shorter work day, incentive pay, and an elaborate personnel management system."⁵⁶ To teach "American ways" to the immigrants, Ford established a Sociology Department, whose case workers focused not only on the work habits of the immigrants but also on their domestic lives, stressing the importance of a middle-class environment and values. Eligibility for incentive pay depended on the immigrant's ability to demonstrate his possession of both the necessary trade skills and the required lifestyle.⁵⁷

Other companies, too, joined in the Americanization fever. As in the case of the Ford plan, businesses commonly combined Americanization programs with welfare capitalism and/or scientific management in a general effort to increase the productivity and loyalty of the workforce. This was in part a response to the reduced labor supply as immigration waned during the war, and in part an effort to counter the growing participation of immigrant workers in unions.⁵⁸

The patriotic wartime atmosphere was favorable to the Americanizers, and gradually the Americanization project became integrated with the general preparedness movement. Local associations promoting and conducting Americanization classes multiplied, as did industrial Americanization plans

⁵⁶Barrett, *Americanization*, p. 1003.

⁵⁷Barrett, *Americanization*; Higham, *Strangers*.

⁵⁸James Barrett has discussed extensively the socialization of immigrants through contact with native workers, i.e., worker- rather than employer-led Americanization. He notes that during the war, unions—especially the more radical ones—were fairly successful in organizing immigrant workers, which made employers apprehensive of a class-conscious workforce. Barrett, *Americanization*.

(by 1919, at least 800 industrial plants had Americanization activity). Despite the variety of these programs, they usually cooperated with national organizations, and the increasing centralization of the national campaign strove to ensure the consistency of the Americanization message through dissemination of standard course materials and course outlines.⁵⁹

Once the war was over, the checks it had placed on industrial discord lifted, and “both capital and labor kicked loose like young colts.”⁶⁰ The regular union demands were supplemented by more radical movements, rebounding from the wartime restrictions and drawing new strength from the Russian Revolution. The industrialists, on the other hand, were adamant to undo the gains that labor had made in both membership and relations with the government, as well as to solidify their own newly improved public image and political power. The campaign to label all labor agitation as un-American, begun in 1912, was thus brought back on track. A case in point was the business reaction to the Great Steel Strike of 1919, which involved 350,000 workers dissatisfied with their 84-hour week and work conditions. The course the Steel Corporation adopted was not to negotiate with the strikers but to focus on turning public opinion against them by labeling the strike un-American and its leaders proponents of Bolshevism and anarchism. When the strike began, public opinion largely favored the strikers. The Steel Corporation’s massive advertisement campaign, urging the strikers to go back to work and emphasizing Americanism, eventually succeeded in its objective: the public turned against the strikers and the

⁵⁹Carey, *Taking*. While the national organization was very heavily business-oriented and probably tried its best to keep the various local efforts in its control, it should nevertheless be noted that both the style and the motives of Americanizers varied greatly, and the movement never became ideologically cohesive. See e.g. Bogardus, *Essentials* and Aronovici, *Americanization* for different takes on Americanization.

⁶⁰Higham, *Strangers*, p.255.

strike ended without the workers having gained a single concession.⁶¹

The Great Steel Strike was only one episode in the hysteria that shook America in the postwar years. For almost two years, the nation was awash with ever-growing estimates of the number of Communists in the country, and the press was filled with reports of subversive activity and anarchist plots. The intense demand for loyalty during the war, defined not only as support for the U.S. rather than some other country in the war effort, but also as total conformity to the “American way,” whatever the state (or the business community) defined it to mean, had provided a fertile breeding ground for suspicion and intolerance. Thus, it was probably no hard task to induce the average citizen to believe in the imminent danger of revolution, and congressmen could seriously announce that “there is real danger that the government will fall.”⁶²

Business propaganda cannot, of course, be blamed for all the intensity and actions of the Red Scare—obviously, the issue is more complex. This is evinced by the number of varying interpretations regarding the causes of the hysteria, as well as by the number of popular, apparently spontaneous attacks by private citizens on “subversives” (an extremely broad category at the time).⁶³ The state, too, was heavily involved; after all, possibly the most famous feature of the Red Scare is Attorney General Mitchell Palmer’s crusade against alien workers and members of the Industrial Workers of the World, and the massive deportations these raids led to.

⁶¹Carey, *Taking*. For a detailed account of the Great Steel Strike and the role that fears of Bolshevism played in defeating it, see Murray, *Communism*.

⁶²Senator Miles Poindexter, quoted in Murray, *Communism*, p. 462.

⁶³See e.g. Coben, *Study in Nativism*. Coben lists a number of extreme incidents of intolerance: for example, in 1919, a sailor fired three shots into the back of a man who had refused to rise for the playing of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at a victory loan pageant—and the crowd cheered; similarly, a clothing store salesman was sentenced to six months in jail for having commented to a customer that Lenin was “the brainiest” or “one of the brainiest” of the world’s political leaders.

It should also be noted that the fears that the business leaders espoused of the radicalism of workers were not entirely unfounded. Labor *had* made gains during the war, the expectations of many workers were relatively high, and many more than before were inclined to accept radical ideas such as worker or national control of certain industries (the railroads and mines, for example).⁶⁴ Moreover, the postwar years witnessed growth in radicalism, as well as a number of violent strikes and even bomb explosions. Nevertheless, the picture of imminent doom that prevailed in the press during the Red Scare was without question hugely exaggerated.⁶⁵

The role of industry in fostering exaggerated media coverage of incipient Bolshevism in America was a significant one. In addition to political advertisements in the newspapers, the indirect influence of the business community was important in the tone of reporting: mass-circulation dailies were increasingly under corporate (rather than entrepreneurial) ownership, the number of newspaper chains was rising, and advertising accounted for over 60 percent of all newspaper revenue. Moreover, as the importance of advertising grew, newspapers increasingly sought not simply the largest possible circulation but also an audience with more buying power, steering coverage toward further compliance with middle-class and business views.⁶⁶

The equation of immigrants (especially new immigrants) with labor agitation and worker's demands with un-American subversion was largely accomplished by the early years of the 1920s. Of course, the major concern of business in encouraging the association of radicalism with immigrants had not been to vilify the immigrant but to ensure a cooperative labor force, a project which was in large measure successful: throughout the twen-

⁶⁴Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*, pp. 116-117.

⁶⁵Carey, *Taking*; Murray, *Communism*.

⁶⁶Abramowitz, *Press*, pp.62-65.

ties, union membership declined and unions remained conciliatory and subdued.⁶⁷ The impact of the equation on the immigrants, however, was quite as immense: various restrictionists had, after all, for decades been saying that the flood of undesirables was going to push the whole country to the brink of revolution—now, here was the proof. Bolshevism, the main bogey of the day, was unavoidably equated with Eastern European immigrants, and the general public had not missed the foreign component of radical organizations. In the wake of the red-baiting hysteria, Americanization of any kind no longer seemed sufficient to combat the evil influence that the immigrant was presumed to have on American society. Restriction, therefore, became the word of the day.

⁶⁷Bernstein, *The Growth of American Unions*.

Chapter 3

Arguing Restriction in Congress

3.1 The Quota Acts

After the war and its immediate aftermath, when the transportation lines again became fully operative, an increasing number of voices were once more raised in warning: Europe, war-weary and in ruins, was going to send over her beaten rabble to America. A number of bills were introduced in Congress calling for various measures against immigrants, including the suspension of immigration for a period ranging from two years to unspecified length.¹ However, the voices of doom were drowned in the general confusion and hysteria of the Red Scare; to some extent, they were also discredited by the failure of the flood of beaten rabble to materialize, and the suspension bills all died in Congress.² But in mid-1920, when the Red Scare had abated and

¹Hutchinson, *Legislative*, pp. 169–171.

²Congress did, however, enact a number of other laws on immigration in 1918–1920, regarding e.g. the deportation of alien enemies and passport controls. In addition, bills on diverse issues relating to immigrants (Americanization, barring immigrants from civil service, deportation of undesirables etc.) were introduced, though not acted upon. See Hutchinson, *Legislative* for details. Hutchinson also provides a detailed discussion of the

the numbers of immigrants began to reach prewar levels, the immigration question again gained prominence both in the press and in Congressional discussions.

Congress had, of course, enacted the long-fought-for literacy test in the 1917 Act. This test had laid the groundwork for the 1920s debate inasmuch as it had embraced the idea of restrictive, instead of merely selective, immigration policy.³ It also added new clauses regarding alien radicals and provided the Department of Labor with the power of deporting them, reflecting the growing fear of socialism and anarchism.⁴ However, the clauses prohibiting radicals excluded fairly few immigrants, and during its long path in Congress the literacy test had become much less stringent than the reading and writing test envisioned by its original proponents in the 1890s. The test, and the law in general, proved “a fairly coarse sieve.”⁵ In late 1920, therefore, a suspension bill was again introduced in Congress, this time softened by exempting close relatives of residents; the urgency of the matter was emphasized in the bill’s name, “A Bill to Provide for the Protection of the Citizens of the United States by the Temporary Suspension of Immigration.”⁶ After the period of suspension was cut down to fourteen months, the bill passed the House with a vote of 296 to 42; all but one of the opposing votes came from the industrial areas between Chicago and Boston, showing the completeness of the attitude-spin that the South and the West had undergone.⁷ The Senate, however, was more sensitive to both business

provisions included in both the 1921 and 1924 Acts and outlines their careers in Congress.

³While the 1917 Act did not directly limit the number of entrants (and apparently was also unsuccessful in significantly diminishing immigration), its literacy test provision applied to such a large group that it was, in the minds of many, in effect a restrictive policy. See e.g. Fairchild, *Literacy Test*; Frank, *From Nativism to the Quota Laws*.

⁴Higham, *Strangers*, p. 221.

⁵Higham, *Strangers*, p. 308.

⁶Similarly, the Senate hearings on the bill were held under the rubric “Emergency Immigration Legislation.” Senate, *Hearings on H.R. 14461*.

⁷Higham, *Strangers*.

and immigrant demands, although many senators agreed with the House that at least the new immigration ought to be cut back. Senator Dillingham, therefore, introduced the quota plan: this would give each European nationality a quota that was to equal 5 percent of the number of foreign-born persons of that nationality residing in the United States at the time of the 1910 census.⁸ Unlike the suspension measure, the Dillingham bill was only concerned with European immigration; immigration from the New World would remain without numerical limitations, and immigration from Asia would continue to be governed by earlier legislation.

The senators amended the percentage from 5 to 3 and then passed the bill easily, after which the House rejected its own suspension plan in favor of the Senate version. President Wilson, receiving the bill during his last days in office, vetoed it; however, it was promptly reintroduced in a special session of Congress, cleared both houses speedily, and received President Harding's signature in May, 1921.⁹

In 1922, the quota law was extended for two years, after only brief debate in the House and slightly broader discussion in the Senate. During this extension period, immigration remained a pertinent issue: several bills were introduced in Congress to either relax or tighten immigration policy, and the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization continued to hold hearings on the subject. However, the next significant step wasn't taken until 1924, when the House Committee reported a bill to replace the expiring temporary quota act. The new draft provided for consular inspection abroad

⁸Higham, *Strangers*. The 1920 census had not yet been completed; it should, however, be noted that in the debate some members insisted that the bill should be rewritten to use the 1920 census as soon as it was completed, the decision to use the 1910 census was, according to these representatives, intentionally discriminative as it would reduce the numbers of Southern and Eastern European immigrants more than a bill based on the 1920 census. See e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 3968; vol. 61, pp. 505, 556–559.

⁹Higham, *Strangers*.

to avoid having to ship back prospective immigrants who came after their nationality quota was filled; moreover, it substituted the census of 1910 for that of 1890 and reduced the percentage from 3 to 2. It also instituted the exclusion of Japanese immigrants.¹⁰

The final form of the quota law, despite heated debate on the House and Senate floors, closely agreed with the proposal put forth by the Committee. It instituted the provision for consular inspection abroad and regulated extensively the specifics of visa applications. It didn't affect immigration from the Western Hemisphere; for Europeans, it fixed the nationality quota at 2 percent of the 1890 census (though all nationalities were to have a minimum quota of 100). The law further provided that after 1927, the maximum number of European immigrants would be 150,000; this was to be divided so that each nationality quota "shall be a number which bears the same ratio to 150,000 as the number of inhabitants in the continental United States in 1920 having that national origin."¹¹ It further excluded all "aliens ineligible to citizenship"—this referred to the Japanese, as Asians were the only group ineligible to citizenship and the Japanese were the only Asians whom no law yet prevented from immigrating.¹² Exempted from both quotas and exclusion were non-immigrant groups such as government officials,

¹⁰Hutchinson, *Legislative*, pp. 182–183. In fact, a draft with the same quota provisions but without Japanese exclusion had been reported in early 1923; however, the circumstances were far from favorable at that time—the depression had lifted and business interests were clamoring for more labor, while farmers were unhappy about their hired hands moving to the cities—and so the matter was deferred. Hutchinson, *Legislative*; Higham, *Strangers*.

¹¹*Immigration Act of 1924*, p. 159. This was to be decided on the basis of immigration statistics and statistics on increase of population. The national origins provision was later the subject of much contention and its institution was delayed until 1929. However, the quotas it resulted in were much the same as those calculated on the basis of the foreign-born present during the 1890 census, although the English received a rather larger share under the national origins system.

¹²*Immigration Act of 1924*, p. 162. Chinese were excluded with a specific act in 1882, and the 1917 Act had created an "Asiatic Barred Zone" preventing the entry of all other Asians.

travelers in transit, tourists, and temporarily entering seamen. Moreover, the quotas did not apply to students, professors, ministers of any religious denomination, or the wives and unmarried children under 18 years of age of resident citizens. The Act also specified preferences within the quotas; these preferences went to close relatives, immigrants “skilled in agriculture” and their wives and dependent children.¹³

Both the permanent Immigration Act of 1924 as well as the earlier temporary version preserved previous immigration laws; in other words, all immigrants would have to be eligible not only under the quota law but also under earlier legislation. The provisions regarding alien radicals and the literacy of immigrants therefore remained in effect, as did the Asian exclusion laws.¹⁴

3.2 Arguing Restriction

The debate on immigration restriction in the first half of the 1920s turned mainly on three questions: the economic impact of immigration, the danger posed by foreign, radical ideas, and the racial character of the immigrants. Which of these was emphasized varied depending on the speaker; the emphasis also shifted over time. In most arguments for restriction, however, all three aspects were intertwined.

Underlying all of the various strains of argumentation was the fear that massive immigration would cause social problems and general instability that would fundamentally alter American society. Phrases such as “alien indigestion,” “foreign invaders,” “flood tide of Bolshevists,” and “the scum of Europe,” appear and reappear in the Congressional debate. Such rhetoric

¹³*Immigration Act of 1924*, pp. 155–156.

¹⁴The 1917 Act applied to all immigrants, not only Europeans. See *An Act to Regulate (1917)*; *An Act to Limit (1921)*; *Immigration Act of 1924*.

is particularly prominent in the debate over the first, temporary, quota act in 1921, reflecting both the impact of the Red Scare and the fear of massive post-war European immigration. Indeed, it is more than likely that the passage of a permanent, tight immigration policy in the 1920s owed much to the fact that the first measure was temporary and came under consideration in the immediate wake of the Red Scare. Opposition, though fairly strong, was made less effective by the temporary nature of the act, and the anxious atmosphere made both congressmen and the public yearn for a concrete way of instituting a “breathing spell.”

In many respects, the fundamental questions regarding immigration law were resolved in the 1920–1921 debate: by the time the bill was signed, both the quota principle and the need for drastic limitation of immigration were solidly established. The law—a hastily designed “emergency measure”—resulted in chaotic conditions on Ellis Islands as officials wondered what to do with immigrants who arrived after their country’s quota had been filled.¹⁵ The imperfect operation of the law resulted in added pressure to draft permanent legislation; it also gave weight to the restrictionists’ plea for tighter controls and fewer immigrants. In the 1924 debate, the opponents of restriction initially tried to argue that the problem was not that the law admitted too many immigrants but that its practical provisions and the way it was enforced made its operation chaotic. These objections, however, were quickly drowned in the convoluted quarrel over the quota basis and in the diplomatic problems regarding Japanese exclusion.

¹⁵The 1921 Act stipulated that no country could use more than 20 percent of its yearly quota in one month; this resulted in immigrant-carrying ships waiting outside the harbor and then racing each other to arrive right after midnight on the first of the month. Most Southern and Eastern European countries also used up their yearly quotas in the first five months, and many immigrants who had embarked in good faith arrived only to find that they would not be admitted.

3.2.1 Race: Assimilation and Unassimilables

Racial arguments for immigration restriction fell into two categories: those used against the Japanese (and other Asians) and those advanced against Southern and Eastern Europeans. Despite referring to both groups as racial, most debaters clearly differentiated between them, so that Southern and Eastern Europeans were clearly considered white (i.e., of the same general race as the debaters themselves) whereas the Japanese were seen as fundamentally different and racially much further removed from the debaters (who were, of course, the reference group as representative of what they termed the “American race.”).

This split shows the elusiveness of the concept of race at the time (and perhaps more generally as well). “Race” was occasionally used as a scientific term, at other times as denoting a popularly acknowledged though not exactly defined category, and still at other times as something more or less synonymous with “national character.” In their speeches, congressmen rarely attempted to define what they meant by the term; rather, they apparently assumed that there was enough of a consensus on the matter among their listeners to avoid confusion. However, while the racial otherness of the Japanese was treated as a given, racial differences between Europeans were argued about at some length, and in the case of Southern and Eastern Europeans restrictionists considered it necessary to cite various authorities and elaborate on the importance a homogeneous population.

As indicated by the greater need for specific arguments, the idea of racial differences between Europeans continued to be controversial. Many members of Congress, journalists, and academics bitterly criticized both the idea and its proponents, asserting that there was no scientific basis for these claims. No such controversy existed regarding the Japanese. Advocates of

Japanese exclusion on the whole felt little need to assert that Japanese were in any sense inferior: they could be confident that their audience would consider the Japanese a different race and, consequently, would also agree that their assimilation into American society was both undesirable and impossible.

Japanese Exclusion

Most of those speaking for exclusion unambiguously stated that in their opinion, whatever the achievements of the Japanese, the racial gulf was so wide between them and whites that they could and should not assimilate. Even those speaking against the specific way in which the law intended to exclude the Japanese usually launched their oratory by emphasizing how they fully agreed that exclusionary or at least stringently restrictive measures ought to be employed against Japanese immigrants.¹⁶

Race was also significant in the way in which the exclusion of Japanese was instituted in the Immigration Act of 1924. The crucial clause read:

No alien ineligible to citizenship shall be admitted to the United States unless such alien (1) is admissible as a non-quota immigrant under the provisions of subdivision (b), (d), or (e) of section 4, or (2) is the wife, or the unmarried child under 18 years of age, of an immigrant admissible under such subdivision (d), and is accompanying or following to join him, or (3) is not an immigrant as defined in section 3.¹⁷

While the Japanese weren't mentioned by name, there was no doubt that they were the target of the clause, and contemporaries consistently referred to the law as "Japanese exclusion."¹⁸ The clause built upon the fact that

¹⁶For statements by congressmen on the racial difference between Japanese and white Americans, see e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, pp. 5680, 5927, 6249, 6465, 6614.

¹⁷Sec 13c, "Immigration Act of 1924," p. 162. Section 4 dealt with non-quota immigrants; the subdivisions b, d, and e let in e.g. previously admitted immigrants seeking to return, professors, ministers of religious denominations, and students who came in solely for the purpose of study. Section 3 defined as "not immigrant" such groups as government officials and tourists..

¹⁸All other Asians, except for Filipinos who were considered American nationals, were

naturalization was restricted to “white persons and persons of African descent”¹⁹ and therefore left the status of Asians unclear.

In her article about the racial definition of American citizenship and immigration law, Mae M. Ngai discusses at some length the process through which the Asians’ ineligibility to citizenship was consolidated in the early 20th century, culminating in two cases before the Supreme Court in 1922 and 1923. Both were petitions to citizenship by highly educated, Americanized immigrants. As the petitioners were Asians, however, the task before the Court was to evaluate whether, given the “white persons and persons of African descent” clause, the petitioners were racially eligible. Federal courts had earlier admitted a number of Syrians, Armenians and Asian Indians to citizenship on the basis of scientific works that placed some Asians in the Caucasian or white category. In *Ozawa v. United States*, the first of the two cases that were to settle the non-whiteness of Asians, the Supreme Court avoided this by “asserting that white and Caucasian were one and the same, concluding, with circular reasoning, that the Japanese cannot be Caucasian because they are not white.” In the second case, *United States vs. Thind*, where the petitioner was an Asian Indian who claimed right to citizenship on the basis of his Aryan and Caucasian roots, the Court finally resolved the problem of scientific definition by discarding them in favor of the popular definition of “Caucasian,” and noting that this was much narrower in scope and did not include Asians.

The Supreme Court, then, had reinforced the racial definition of American citizenship already prevented from immigrating by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the “Asiatic Barred Zone” created by the Immigration Act of 1917.

¹⁹“Naturalization Act of 1870,” quoted in Daniels, *Coming*, p. 245 Originally, naturalization had been restricted to “free white persons,” but was extended to persons of African descent after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. This was “a gratuitous gesture to the former slaves,” states Ngai, citing a federal judge’s explanation that nobody expected Africans to emigrate, whereas the Asians were obviously doing so. Ngai, *Architecture*, p. 81.

can citizenship and confirmed the popular perception that Asians, regardless of their achievements, were unsuited to live in the American society.

In the exclusionist argument, too, race was paramount, and the achievements of the Japanese were irrelevant to the question of their desirability as immigrants. In fact, they received ample praise: they were described as hard-working, thrifty, ambitious, and enterprising—all characteristics that in other contexts were used to describe good American citizens. Yet, the very people portraying the Japanese in this way were adamant that they should not be let into the country—indeed, they cited those very qualities as the reason the Japanese should be kept out. For example, Mr. Wallace of the American Federation of Labor stated before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization that

when the Japs first came as laborers, the American boy left the farm because it became a Jap's job. And eventually, what was the result? Those people that came here to work—agricultural laborers, if you will—became the owners of the land. [...] Now, people are asking, if these people are thrifty, why should they not eventually own the land? And I want to say that I think that the people who cut this country out of the wilderness have a prior right...²⁰

Similarly, one congressman complained that the Japanese had acquired control of about one sixth of the richest California lands by 1920, that they were “rapidly getting control of the fishing business,” saved money in Japanese-owned banks, owned stores, and attended American schools “and in many instances are in the majority in attendance.” In the case of Caucasian immigrants, business success and interest for education were much more commonly cited in the immigrants’ favor than to their detriment, even if manifestations of ethnic solidarity (such as immigrant banks) were often seen as threatening. With the Japanese, however, thrift and industry were

²⁰Wallace, *Statement*, p. 87.

sinister traits: any positive images that the Japanese successes might have created were quickly countered by allusions to the economic threats that this posed for Americans. For example, the reason this particular congressman objected to Japanese store ownership was that in those stores they purchased “goods made in their own country and brought here by their own ships” and that because the Japanese controlled the growing of green vegetables, Americans were being forced out of business, “preference being given by Japanese to Japanese stores.”²¹ While Japanese ethnic solidarity probably was a fact (as it was with practically all immigrant groups, not only the Japanese) it is more than likely that it was reinforced by the refusals of white Americans to do business with the Japanese. As Mr. Freeman, a member of the (Washington) State Veteran’s Welfare Committee, lamented before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization,

Six or seven years ago the grocers of the city of Seattle [...] tried to get an agreement by which the white wholesale grocers should not sell to the Japanese, and they were going to put pressure to bear to protect themselves, when the United States district attorney notified them that if they did that they would be subject to prosecution under the Federal laws, so that they were helpless...²²

Though the exclusionists viewed all Japanese businesses with distaste, they were primarily concerned by the inclination of the Japanese to purchase land and engage in farming. What makes this concern particularly interesting is that one of the major objections to the “new” European immigrants was that they tended to settle in urban areas and work in industrial rather than agrarian occupations, thereby eluding the democratizing and Americanizing influences of the wholesome farm life. Ronald Takaki notes that the Japanese had understood the American preference for rural dwellers and tried to act accordingly, hoping that bringing their families, acquiring land,

²¹ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5926.

²² Freeman, *Statement*, p. 236.

and showing that they intended to settle and become Americans would facilitate acceptance.²³ Instead, Americans responded by accusing them of driving “white laborers and tenants away from farms”²⁴ and complaining that

it is impossible for white people to compete with people of that sort who live in squalid quarters, make their mothers, wives, and children work in the field, live on such a limited diet that no white man could exist on it, and work long and unusual hours which would break down the health of any white man.²⁵

Contemporaries did not comment on the contradiction involved in decrying the Southern and Eastern Europeans for not wanting to till the soil and the Japanese for doing exactly that. It is therefore difficult to know whether they perceived any contradiction, and if so, how they explained it. It could be argued that though the Japanese engaged in farming, their farms were heavily concentrated in one region, thereby both making them prominent and decreasing the likelihood of assimilation; however, like ethnic solidarity, this was not a phenomenon restricted to Japanese immigrants (consider, for example, the Scandinavians in the Midwest). A far more plausible explanation is that the Japanese were seen as so fundamentally different racially that their presence itself was distasteful to many, and certainly wasn’t made more palatable by their success in business or indications that they wished to stay. Indeed, former Senator James D. Phelan (CA), advocating exclusion, stated that

The ultimate purpose of the Japanese which we cannot overlook is to establish themselves in this country on an equality with Europeans and thus enjoy citizenship, the voting privilege, the ownership of land and other benefits.²⁶

²³Takaki, *Strangers*, pp. 195-197.

²⁴Mr. McClatchy in *NYT*, March 12, 1924

²⁵MacLafferty in *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5927.

²⁶*NYT*, March 14, 1924

Lawrence Fuchs notes that “[t]he Japanese were seen as superhuman; yet in 1924 Congress agreed that all Asians should be barred from immigration.”²⁷ This statement is certainly warranted by the picture the exclusionists painted of the “yellow race” as so thrifty, cunning, enterprising, untiring, proud, and expansionist that whites couldn’t possibly compete. Nevertheless, many of those who professed nothing but admiration for the Japanese and argued that the exclusion drive was not based on a perception of racial inferiority, only racial difference, reveal in other statements a distaste that indicates something more emotional than a mere intellectual conviction that different races cannot successfully live together. A good example of such “double vision” (or double standard, at any rate) is provided by Representative MacLafferty’s (CA) comments in the House. In his speech, he stated:

I am an admirer of the Japanese people. I know the Japanese people in their own country, and I would to God that our young manhood and young womanhood were growing up with the knowledge and habit of work and industry that the Japanese young women and young men possess. I said that I am an admirer of the Japanese; but above all and beyond all, I admire them most in Japan and not on the Pacific coast of North America.²⁸

Many declarations of this type were made in the debate over exclusion; many of them were also similarly contradicted in other contexts by more off-hand utterances. In MacLafferty’s case the contradiction came only a moment later: when asked about the Japanese in the schools, he explained that “while the Pacific coast loved Theodore Roosevelt, his demand that we admit the Japanese men to our schools and allow them to sit besides [sic] our little American girls came near costing him our friendship.”²⁹

²⁷Fuchs, *Kaleidoscope*, p. 116.

²⁸*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5680

²⁹*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5681

The Japanese, then, had no way of convincing white Americans that they could make good citizens: the barrier of race, which it was hopeless for them to argue with, thoroughly disqualified them—without stirring controversy: unlike the Southern and Eastern Europeans, the Japanese received practically no sympathy and even less support from native Americans. In fact, the political and military power of Japan was probably the only thing that had kept back anti-Japanese legislation so far: Roger Daniels notes that “[h]ad Japan been a weak nation, as China was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is little doubt that some kind of Japanese exclusion legislation would have passed Congress in the first decade of the twentieth century.”³⁰ As Japan, however, was a nation to be reckoned with, the problem was for some time dealt with through diplomacy, and between 1906 and 1924 the Japanese immigration was controlled through the Gentlemen’s Agreement. This was not a formal treaty but rather an executive agreement between Japan and the United States: it stipulated that Japan was to stop issuing passports to its laborers bound for the U.S., while the U.S. on its part would not pass discriminatory legislation against Japanese immigrants.³¹

Though the exclusionists made a number of long speeches stressing the racial unacceptability of the Japanese and the urgent need to prohibit them from entering, most of the debate itself concerned problems with regulation of immigration through treaty. The exclusionists argued that the Gentlemen’s Agreement was not effective, and that in any case, it was an aberration in immigration policy. They argued that Congress had the sole power to legislate on immigration, and were resentful of Japan’s protests, branding them as attempts by a foreign power to control American policy and

³⁰Daniels, *Not Like Us*, p. 74.

³¹Daniels, *Not Like Us*, p. 74.

decision-making. The Secretary of State, Charles Hughes, repeatedly urged Congress not to offend Japan through exclusionary measures, and pointed out that applying the quota system to the Japanese would practically exclude them.³²

The economic and military power of Japan made the exclusion fervor a rather embarrassing political problem. In an article published in the *Political Science Quarterly* in 1923, Raymond Leslie Buell discussed the problem of exclusion. Unlike most congressmen, Buell considered there to be “absolutely no racial characteristic which is responsible for” either the higher birthrate of the Japanese or the fact that they accepted lower wages, arguing that both of these would disappear if the standard of living of the Japanese immigrants is “raised through the processes of Americanization,” though he stated that “it will be impossible to Americanize, even to the slightest extent, a steady stream of Orientals.”³³ He agreed, therefore, that Japanese exclusion was desirable. However, he pointed out that Japan had consistently opposed the inclusion of the words “ineligible to citizenship” in U.S. immigration law, even when those words would not have affected Japanese immigration, and stated that any exclusion policy should be such as to convince Japan “that we insist on exclusion, not because of racial inferiority, but because of racial difference.”³⁴ Accordingly, he advocated a reciprocal exclusion treaty that would have prevented American labor from going to Japan and vice versa; this, in his opinion, should have been combined with granting the Japanese immigrants already in America eligibility for citizenship to enable and encourage them to adapt themselves to American

³²Charles Hughes to Albert Johnson, reprinted in *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, pp. 5585–7. Japan wouldn’t have received a quota of more than a few hundred immigrants under any version of the quota system based on the census of 1890.

³³Buell, *Development*, p. 76.

³⁴Buell, *Development*, p. 81.

life.³⁵

Unlike Buell, congressmen were not about to advocate giving Japanese the right to citizenship: on the contrary, there was an attempt to include a provision in the immigration bill to make sure Japanese ex-servicemen would not be naturalized.³⁶ However, the ineligibility of Japanese to citizenship was often used as an argument for exclusion (with the logic, of course, that as they could not become citizens, they could never fully participate in American society and be properly Americanized). Most of those opposed to the section of the immigration bill that excluded the Japanese explained that they were not opposed to prohibiting the immigration of Japanese, but that there was no reason to offend Japan as exclusion or near-exclusion could be effected through either the quota system or the continuation of regulation through treaty. They therefore had no quarrel with the view that different races should be kept apart; rather, they were concerned that the specific way in which the exclusionists proposed to do this would cause diplomatic problems, hurt American economic interests, and make the United States appear negligent of its treaty obligations.³⁷

In a last-ditch effort to solve the problem to everyone's satisfaction, a provision was added to the section excluding the Japanese which postponed the date on which exclusion was to take effect to March 1, 1925, and requested the president to negotiate an abrogation of "the present arrangement" before that time.³⁸ Despite repeated reassurances that this would in no way imperil exclusion and that very few Japanese could enter between July 1,

³⁵Buell, *Development*, pp. 80-81. In Buell's view, placing Japanese under the same quota regulations as Europeans would have been satisfactory as well, but he considered it unlikely that the quota system would be permanent, and therefore the exclusion issue would resurface if solved under that system.

³⁶*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, pp. 3458-3460.

³⁷See e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, pp. 6249-6251, 8229-8230, 8245.

³⁸*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 8225.

1924 (when the other provisions of the bill went into effect) and the March 1, 1925, the exclusionists were not satisfied. They argued, logically enough, that if the phrase meant nothing then there was no reason to insert it, and insisted that Congress was the sole governmental body with the power to regulate immigration and could not yield to requests from foreign nations.

As it turned out, the exclusionist drive was strong enough to override concern about diplomatic affairs, and on May 16, 1924, the *New York Times* headline read: “Congress Adopts Early Japanese Ban: Huge Votes for Exclusion.” The article explained that “not a single protest” had been raised against exclusion, and the conference report of the bill had been accepted 308 to 58 in the House and 69 to 9 in the Senate.³⁹ On May 26, President Coolidge signed the bill, though he declared that he would have vetoed it had it been only about exclusion.⁴⁰

Southern and Eastern Europeans

Racial considerations were not limited to Asian immigrants, but significantly influenced the debate over the “new” (i.e. Southern and Eastern European) immigration as well. This is evident not only from the immigration restriction discussion itself, but from the fact that the chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Albert Johnson, had close connections with eugenists and was, in fact, appointed honorary president of the Eugenics Research Association in 1923.⁴¹

It should be noted, however, that the significance of racial views regarding European immigration can be overstated. Whereas restrictionists saw race as the all-important factor in the question of Japanese exclusion, their

³⁹ *NYT*, May 16, 1924

⁴⁰ *NYT*, May 27, 1924.

⁴¹ Ludmerer, *Genetics*, pp. 74-75.

view of Southern and Eastern Europeans was more varied, and racial arguments not only alternated with economic and social ones but were also relatively ambiguous.

First of all, the racial divide between the old and the new European immigration was by no means an uncontroversial issue. To be sure, the new immigrants had met popular prejudice and negative stereotypes ever since they began to arrive, but the perception that they were racially different never became as solid as in the case of Japanese and other Asians. At no point of the quota debates could restrictionists expect that racial arguments against Europeans would be received without comment, either among their fellow congressmen or among the general public.

Instances where arguments against Southern and Eastern European immigrants were based solely on race are very few; they were usually advanced in combination with other arguments (such as economic factors, the danger of an immigrant “flood” etc.). Even when emphasizing the new immigration’s inferiority to the old, the speakers commonly framed their argument in terms of cultural, historical and environmental factors rather than in terms of hereditary causes.

That race-based arguments against Southern and Eastern Europeans remained controversial and ambiguous shows that the efforts of the racial theorists were not fully successful: a number of congressmen denounced racial categorization of European nationalities as ridiculous pseudo-science, while others were sympathetic toward the idea but did not adopt its rigid scientific argumentation. While it cannot be doubted that the perception of new immigrants as inferior was instrumental in the passing of the quota acts, that idea of inferiority is in most cases more appropriately described as cultural or ethnic prejudice than as coherent racial ideology.

This is not to deny that many arguments presented in Congress clearly drew upon the emerging scientific racism. Often these arguments focused on the problem of preserving national unity, as exemplified by these remarks by Representative Vaile:

It has been also stated in argument that we are all immigrants, or the sons of immigrants. [...] I submit that it means absolutely nothing [...] because it ignores the great fundamental truth [...] that the people of the United States have a distinct European history, that they are of distinct racial stock [...] That racial stock is, as I shall endeavor to prove to you, at least three-fourths of the Nordic race. It is not the only good race in the world, but it happens to be the race of most of the people who are here. [...] Other stocks are fine, but a nation [...] is a country where they have a history of their own, a language of their own, institutions of their own, and enough national consciousness to preserve them. We are starting here this very day on a policy of preserving what we have.⁴²

Even when actual racial classifications were not referred to, strong prejudice was often displayed. One representative, in discussing the three percent bill in 1921, declared that it was not discriminative enough:

Behold the immigration policy, the unutterable national stupidity that can not or will not discriminate between the gentleman of English, French and German culture on the one hand, and the bashibazouk, with his traditions of murder, plunder and assassination on the other.⁴³

While this particular representative was more graphic in his comments than most, his views were shared by many: one of the major accusations leveled at Southern and Eastern Europeans was that, coming from countries where disorder and tyranny reigned, they had not learned to respect the law or the government.⁴⁴

The impact of race thinking gained momentum as time passed and the eugenists' campaign intensified. By 1924, the racial composition of the immigrant stream had received extensive attention in the press, and there was

⁴²*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 3970.

⁴³*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 555.

⁴⁴See e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, pp. 173, 230; vol. 61, pp. 502, 3456; vol. 65, pp. 5665

no doubt that the permanent law was intended to control America's ethnic composition by employing the 1890 census as the basis of calculating national quotas. This drastically reduced the quotas allotted to Southern and Eastern Europeans, most of whom had arrived after 1890, while allowing most Northern and Western Europeans larger quotas than they wished to fulfill. As one representative commented: "So far as I am concerned, it would be all right to go back [to 1790] and begin anew and let nobody in this country except those who have Anglo-Saxon or Nordic blood throbbing in their veins"⁴⁵—but as the 1890 census was the first to include classification by nationality, that would have to serve.

Opponents of the 1890 census basis accused its advocates of unfair discrimination toward Southern and Eastern Europeans. Originally, the advocates of that census basis had conceded that their intention was indeed to "change the character of our future immigration by cutting down the number of aliens who can come from southern and eastern Europe" because "on the whole, northern and western Europe furnish the best material for citizenship."⁴⁶ Under increasing pressure, however, they now responded with a rather entangled line of reasoning, which asserted that using the 1890 census was not discrimination, since it most accurately reflected the "national origins" of the U.S. population. In other words, they argued that if one counted not only the foreign-born, but the whole population of the country, and classified that by the nationalities of their ancestors, then the end result would be more or less the same breakdown as reflected in the foreign-born population in the country in 1890. Accordingly, Senator David A. Reed and John B. Trevor, "a patrician New Yorker who belonged to the circle of Madison Grant" and was something of a grey eminence in the drafting

⁴⁵*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5677

⁴⁶Johnson, *Immigration*, p. 50.

of the 1924 Act, proposed that the census-based quota should in time be replaced by a national origins system, to be determined by a study of the national origins of the U.S. population. This way, “one could claim to offer exact justice to every ethnic strain in the white population.”⁴⁷

The claim of the justice of the national origins scheme did not confuse the opponents of changing the census basis. As one of them sneered,

The proponents now say that they do not discriminate while the whole of the so-called scientific study carried on by this Doctor Laughlin—and the first syllable is spelled L-a-u-g-h—was to prove that we ought to discriminate against southern and eastern Europeans, because they are inferior.⁴⁸

Whether the claims of non-discrimination swayed the opinions of undecided congressmen or the general public is impossible to ascertain, though the necessity to emphasize fairness seems to indicate a fairly high measure of opposition to racializing European immigrants. What is certain, however, that the national origins proposal succeeded in setting the terms of the debate. From now on, the debaters were locked into a rather fruitless tug-of-war, where both sides accused each other of discriminative intent. The opponents of the 1890 census reiterated their earlier objections, while its proponents claimed (rather ingeniously) that it was the 1910 census which was discriminative, because it gave Northern Europeans a much smaller quota than was warranted by their total (foreign-born and native) presence in the country. In other words, even if the national origins system didn’t quell the objections to using the 1890 census basis, it did shift the focus by redefining the concept of “fairness” in immigration policy. In 1921 many of the opponents of the temporary measure had emphasized that the idea of quotas was in conflict with traditional American principles of looking not at

⁴⁷Higham, *Send These to Me*, pp. 55-56; see also Higham, *Strangers*, pp. 319-321.

⁴⁸*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5617

a man's origins but at his individual worth; now, however, the debate was so utterly centered on how to divide the quotas that the question of whether the quotas themselves was acceptable no longer entered the discussion.

3.2.2 Immigrants and the Economy

Traditionally, immigration had been considered an economic question first and foremost. In good times, immigrants had been seen as a resource, rather like a return on an investment which someone else had made, while in bad times they were accused of bringing down wages and becoming public charges. By the 1920s, other considerations (such as national unity) had eclipsed economic ones, and while they still had a prominent position in the debate, they were rarely presented as the only or even the main issue to be considered in the planning of immigration policy.

Economic arguments were still fairly often used in the debate over the emergency measure in 1920-21: the postwar recession and the high unemployment rate, as well as fears of an "immigrant flood," were among the factors that prompted congressmen to advocate suspending or drastically restricting immigration. They argued that the standard of living would inevitably be brought down if more immigrants were allowed to enter an already overflowing job market, and that this in turn was unfair toward American workers and would lead to general unrest as unemployment increased. This argument depended on two premises: one, that there in fact were high numbers of immigrants waiting to enter the American job market (and that this entrance would not be compensated by a comparable emigration), and two, that the economy would not be able to absorb them. Much energy and paper was spent on proving the case either way, the proponents of restriction marshaling reports of Europeans clamoring to buy steamship

tickets and even of European governments planning to “dump” their poor on America, and opponents trying to contradict these with statistics of return migration and reports of labor shortages in various industries.⁴⁹ However, the debate had an undercurrent of fear that statistics could not sooth; what was at issue was not the specific economic situation at any one point, but rather the very survival of the nation’s economic system.

This fear was at the root of the arguments concerning the “flood” of prospective immigrants. One representative, for example, argued that

the flow from overpopulated and economically impoverished countries will continue until there is no longer any inducement in the United States as against the home country. That is to say, until our density of population and economic condition approximates [sic] that of the country whose standard is lowest.⁵⁰

Others contended that the immigrants, upon arriving in the United States and not finding the lucrative employment they had expected, would turn radical—and that the result of all this would be that the U.S. would begin to resemble European countries and become a society ridden with class conflict. Here, too, it is evident that many restrictionists did not consider the economic situation to be the crucial factor; rather, they felt that character of immigration was the fundamental problem, only accentuated by the economic situation. They argued that the U.S. was now receiving entrants that in all respects were inferior to earlier immigrants: the new immigrants were not the enterprising and industrious sort that had built the nation, but a type that was accustomed to thinking in terms of class and would react accordingly when placed in an economically challenging situation.⁵¹

Another aspect considered important by the restrictionists was that not

⁴⁹See e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, pp. 179–180, 184–185, 187; vol. 61, pp. 515–518, 567, 585, 924–925, 964.

⁵⁰*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, , p. 141.

⁵¹See e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 187.

only were the aliens arriving in huge numbers, but the great majority of them were staying in the cities, contributing to congestion and unemployment. Various amendments were proposed at different stages of the bill regarding the distribution of immigrants; the intent of these amendments was to encourage (or force) a portion of the arriving immigrants to settle in rural areas and do farm work. While most congressmen were unanimous that it would be a good thing if more immigrants were to engage in agriculture, they did not believe this could be achieved through legislative means.⁵²

Despite the economic hardships of the early twenties, opponents of restriction attempted to use economic arguments in their favor: they brought in statistics showing that there was dearth of labor in various areas, argued that “labor creates labor,” and asserted that immigrants were needed to do certain kinds of manual labor that Americans were unwilling to perform. They had little success, however. The fear inspired by the prospect of “alien hordes” that would change the face of America was stronger than pragmatic considerations, and the ideal of “wholesome” Americanism often prompted restrictionists to argue that if it was the case that foreigners were needed to do “our dirty work,” then that situation should be remedied rather than supported: “I do not wish to see Americans sit and become opulent, inactive, and weak,” one representative declared, and continued: “Through work and energy we become strong [...] To become soft is to become decadent. Let us instill into the minds of every American, whether native or foreign born, that this is the great land of opportunity, where work counts and perseverance wins success.”⁵³ In addition, many restrictionists argued that the question was too important to be decided on economic grounds only; that

⁵²The farm labor problem was eventually resolved in the 1924 Act by giving immigrants “skilled in agriculture” second preference—after immediate relatives of citizens—within the quota, to be applied to immigrants from countries whose quota was greater than 300. See Sec. 6a, *Immigration Act of 1924*, p. 155. Moreover, as Western Hemisphere migration was not affected by the quotas, Mexican immigrants could come to the U.S. as seasonal agricultural workers.

⁵³*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 585.

if increased production of goods could only be secured by reduction of Americanism, by lowering our standards of living, by replacing the English language with a medley of other tongues, by substituting for American communities polyglot colonies where our Constitution and laws are neither respected nor understood, by changing the character of our race—then production is bought at too great a cost.⁵⁴

In the discussion regarding the 1924 Act, economic arguments received much less attention. The focus in that debate was mostly on the quota basis and the question of Japanese exclusion (see section 3.2.1). In addition, the general economic situation was improving. Restrictionists still occasionally pointed out that immigrants had become unnecessary from an economic standpoint, and supported their argument by referring to wartime production and the economic upturn which had taken place despite the emergency quota law. Opponents of restriction, similarly, tried to defend immigrants by citing their contributions to the American economy; these, however, were not really arguments for immigration but rather attempts to exonerate the new immigrants from accusations of being consumers rather than producers and generally “scum” that could only detract from, not contribute to, American wealth.

3.2.3 Saving American Institutions

Racial and economic arguments for immigration restriction were backed up by another factor: a vague but pervasive sense of alarm over what high numbers of immigrants would do to American society. This sense of alarm is displayed over and over again in the debates; indeed, the perception that America is in grave peril seems to be so commonplace that the speakers often omit to specify either the causes or the manifestations of this peril. More detailed statements, however, reveal that the fear of immigrants is

⁵⁴ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 509.

intimately connected to fear of radicalism, subversion and disloyalty.

The suspicion that immigrants held “un-American” principles and that their impact, if not their very intention, was to utterly change the American society was what gave force to the demand for swift and decisive action on immigration. Nearly all congressmen who spoke in favor of either suspension or restriction in 1920-21 alluded at some point to the imminent danger to “American institutions” if drastic measures were not adopted. The statements rarely specified either the institutions or the concrete danger, but kept to vague language that intimated a nationalism apprehensive of everything foreign: Congress must act so “that we may have time to make sure that this country and its institutions shall not be impaired or destroyed by the foreign element,”⁵⁵ everyone’s aim should be “to add to the glory, power and influence of this Nation and to preserve uncontaminated the true American spirit of the fathers who built this government” and to “teach more Americanism and less Europeanism.”⁵⁶ Speaking against an amendment to insert an exempt for farm labor into the suspension bill, one representative remarked that this would “admit the whole scum of creation into the United States” and that far from doing this, Congress should make suspension a permanent law and “prevent all foreigners from coming into the United States to live.”⁵⁷

The purportedly huge flock of immigrants, while important in the economic argument against immigration as well, was an even more alarming prospect when combined with that there was a “flood tide of bolshevists, anarchists, and bomb throwers”⁵⁸ waiting to enter the country; that “Lenin and Trotski are carrying on a propaganda [sic] in this country [and] scores

⁵⁵ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 181.

⁵⁶ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 181.

⁵⁷ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 230.

⁵⁸ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 229.

of their agents are seeking admission here in order to carry on their devilish work in America” and that immigration restriction was necessary in order to keep out “dangerous and deadly enemies of the country.”⁵⁹

Radicalism, and occasionally all labor organizing, was by this time in many minds inextricably linked to alien ideas and immigration (see section 2.3.2). For example, when Representative Sabath, one of the staunchest defenders of new immigrants in Congress, asked Johnson whether he was aware that the Washington Post had reported the AFL to be opposed to the emergency quota bill, the following exchange ensued:

Mr. JOHNSON of Washington. I do not think that the great body of the Federation of Labor has acted on this matter, their leaders here may have acted in opposition, but if they have it would not make any difference. (Applause). Their leaders acted ahead of the last election, and with what result?

Mr. FOCHT. What language is that printed in? Is it Yiddish?

Mr. SABATH. No, it is the Washington Post.

While Focht’s comment shows how readily all labor activity was attributed to “foreign” influence, the sneering tone employed by Johnson (who was the chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization and one of the principal authors of the bill) also calls to question the sincerity of the concern for the American workingman that restrictionists professed to have.

The depth of the fear of radicalism and foreign influence is clearly illustrated in the discussion surrounding certain proposed amendments. For example, Representative Blanton introduced an amendment (which was rejected) to strike out the provision of the bill that exempted bona fide students from the quota limitations. Blanton argued that the provision would admit “men who claim to be students, and yet who enter the universities of our land for no other purpose than poisoning the minds of the American

⁵⁹ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 3449.

youth.”⁶⁰ Similarly, in defending his amendment to reduce the quota further to one percent of the foreign-born population, Representative Quin argued that the bill was not strict enough, that it was going to “allow professors to come, and they may come in here with all their anti-American spirit, with the ideals of bolshevism, and all other dangerous isms, and demoralize the communities wherever they may go into.”⁶¹

Especially instructive is the opposition to Representative Sabbath’s amendment which proposed to exempt political refugees from the quotas. Sabbath contended that it was an established American tradition to admit political refugees, and that moreover “every civilized nation” granted asylum to such persons.⁶² The restrictionists professed horror at this prospect, declaring that such an amendment would oblige the U.S. to let in communists from countries whose regimes were opposed to them, and that if “Lenin and Trotsky should be overthrown by the people of Russia, under this amendment that whole coterie of bolsheviks could come en bloc to the United States.”⁶³ Moreover, they argued, the world situation was so unstable that the country would be overrun with people claiming to be political refugees.⁶⁴ In an unusually irrational turn, some representatives voiced concern that the passage of the amendment would mean that if Kaiser William was to seek asylum in the U.S. he would have to be admitted, political refugee as he was—a concern which, as Representative Cockran noted, proceeded “on the extraordinary theory that [...] refugees would seek the country from which they were refugees.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 233.

⁶¹ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 572. Professors, like bona fide students, were allowed to enter even after the quotas had been filled, though, unlike students, they were counted in the quota if they entered before it was filled.

⁶² *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 581.

⁶³ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 582.

⁶⁴ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 588.

⁶⁵ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, p. 585.

What the concern over American institutions amounted to, then, was a combination of anti-radicalism and jingoistic nationalism. Practically every proposal to relax the restrictiveness of any part of the bill elicited immediate clamor about the “hordes” of entrants that would result, usually intensified by claims that those entrants would be of the very worst kind. Similarly, attempts to argue against the law on the basis that it was unfair to prospective immigrants prompted restrictionists to contend that American interests should be the only ones considered by the American Congress, and that no foreign governments should be allowed to dictate American policy.⁶⁶

This nationalism is displayed also in the question of immigrant loyalties. Interestingly, the accusation of disloyalty seems to have been made more often in the debate in 1923-24 than in the one in 1920-21. There are, to be sure, examples of this accusation in 1920-21 as well; one representative, for example, suggested that numerous immigrants withdrew their first papers (i.e. applications for citizenship) during the war in order to avoid draft, and proposed that all such immigrants should be deported.⁶⁷ However, those congressmen opposed to the bill cited figures which showed that certain foreign-born groups had enlisted in greater numbers than the general population, and they were apparently fairly successful in arguing that immigrants had displayed extraordinary courage and loyalty during the war. In addition, most immigrants (and especially the new immigrants under such attack) came from countries that had been allied with the U.S. during the war, which gave the opponents of the measure an added weapon. These factors probably made the question of loyalty a somewhat unattractive one to restrictionists, and they tended to keep to the broader and more popular issue of the immigrants’ alleged anarchist and bolshevist affiliation.

⁶⁶See e.g. *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, pp. 568, 588; vol. 65, pp. 5643, 5647, 5675.

⁶⁷*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, p. 245.

Many scholars have argued that although the intensive post-war Red Scare was short-lived, it had a more lasting impact, associating all kinds of social reform with radicalism, bolshevism and alien influence for the rest of the decade.⁶⁸ This is evident in the debate over immigration restriction as well. In 1920-21, the rhetoric of the restrictionists was awash with direct references to bolshevism, the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Trotsky, and the membership of aliens in radical organizations. By 1923-24, these direct references had dwindled, but the sense of menace loomed as large as ever.⁶⁹ Fear of subversion had not disappeared; it had merely taken a different form. The threat of foreign ideas was now more directly connected to immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, rather than to immigrants in general, and occasionally combined with the racial argument against them (see section 3.2.1). One of the major accusations leveled at the new immigrants was that they did not adopt American ideals but rather remained loyal to their countries of origin: "Foreigners are coming into our country who to all intents and purposes hold allegiance to the land from which they came, and they send back home millions of dollars every year."⁷⁰ While they were now rarely accused of direct involvement in radical organizations, the new immigrants were nevertheless vilified on the basis that they congregated in ethnic ghettos, espoused a "hate for government,"⁷¹ and brought with them "strange customs and ideals of social justice."⁷² According to the

⁶⁸See e.g. Goldberg, *Discontented America*; Coben, *Study in Nativism*.

⁶⁹There are a few plausible reasons for the reduction in anti-radical rhetoric: on the one hand, the excesses of the Palmer raids and other facets of the Red Scare had to some extent discredited such violent rhetoric; on the other, the Bolshevik Revolution had not landed on American shores, the more radical labor organizations had been virtually annihilated by the earlier hysteria and the American Federation of Labor was sounding an increasingly cooperative note, all of which made references to radicalism seem rather superfluous.

⁷⁰*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 6376.

⁷¹*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5665.

⁷²*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 6461

restrictionists, the country was therefore in grave danger of becoming unrecognizable, and curbing immigration was the the only way of performing “our duty to maintain [the country] for ourselves and as an example for the world.”⁷³

In addition to doubting immigrants’ loyalties, the restrictionists questioned the motives of everyone who suggested that the legislation was unfair toward certain nationality groups and might therefore affront foreign countries. Such suggestions prompted accusations that those making them were worried of losing the “foreign vote” in their districts, as well as angry declarations that “[e]very true American should distinctly understand that it is the inherent right of our country to determine who shall and who shall not come to our shores.”⁷⁴ Foreign governments had no right to protest against American policies, and Americans themselves should certainly put American interests before all others.

The task of “saving American institutions,” then, was the all-important issue which drew together every strain of argument against immigration, whether economic, social, or racial. Especially in the early stages of the debate, when suspension (for a period ranging from six months to ten years) was the proposed remedy for immigration, the restrictionists often employed such phrases as “a breathing spell” and “taking stock”; in other words, there was a strong sense that things were moving too fast and it was necessary to stop and review the situation before more serious harm would result. This language, and more generally the almost hysterical concern for “the American way of life,” may have reflected apprehensions in the face of the substantial change taking place in the American society. While immigrants were hardly the source of this change, they were an easy target for the anger

⁷³ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5689.

⁷⁴ *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, p. 5675.

it aroused.

Chapter 4

The Anti-Immigrant Climate

The Congressional debate, while covering a major portion of the standard arguments against immigration, does not give a full picture of the anti-immigrant impulse in the early 1920s. Especially on the subject of race and ethnicity, the tone of Congressional discussion (whether through conviction or through political necessity) tended to be somewhat more muted than the one played by the popular press or by some of the organizations supporting restriction. While some congressmen did give full vent to their hostility toward immigrants, many others felt the need to emphasize that their views were the result of rational deliberation, not of hatred or bigotry.

In addition to these explicit declarations of impartiality, the congressional debaters also simply refrained from referring to certain arguments: for example, advocates of restriction practically never stated that new immigrants were undesirable because many of them were Jewish or Catholic.¹ Whatever the reason for this was, it was not the absence of such sentiment

¹The early stage of the debate in 1920, however, does contain e.g. a report (*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 61, pp. 497–499) on the prospective emigrants in the European ports; the report especially draws attention to the number of Jewish emigrants. In addition, occasional references that indicate the acceptability of anti-Semitism also appear in the *Congressional Record*; see e.g. the quote on page 63.

in the society in general. Anti-Catholicism, a significant force in earlier bouts of nativism, was a significant factor in American life in the twenties as well; the Ku Klux Klan, for example, focused extensively (and in some areas primarily) on the political influence of Catholics, claiming that these “agents of Rome” were arming for battle. Similarly, anti-Semitism was common both in populist and elitist forms: Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* published crude articles elaborating on Jewish control of practically every aspect of American life, and colleges throughout the U.S. instituted methods of limiting the enrollment of Jewish students.

To understand the full breadth of the restrictionist climate in the early twenties, then, examining only the debates of Congress is not sufficient. While the questions of race and ethnicity probably elicited the broadest variation in viewpoints, it is also informative to look at how the other aspects of immigration that Congress considered—the role of immigrants in the economy and their alleged radicalism—were represented by other factions of the society. The “alien menace” was many things to many people: labor leaders feared the immigrant’s impact on wages, while patriotic organizations abhorred his alleged radical tendencies; even the eugenists, whose primary policy impact was to solidify the racial basis of restriction, differed on whether it was the immigrant’s individual or racial heritage that mattered most to his America’s future.

4.1 Theoretical and Popular Prejudice

4.1.1 The Influence of Eugenics

Theories of race, developed by social scientists and eugenists in the years after 1910, had a considerable impact on immigration restriction. These

theories and their popularization did much to stir up alarm about immigration and support for restriction; they were probably even more instrumental in bringing about the nationality- or race-based form that restriction took. The ideas of leading eugenists were widely reported in the popular press (especially the *Saturday Evening Post*) and the eugenists themselves wielded great influence as lobbyists on the Capitol.² To some extent, racial theories also converged with popular prejudices in condemning Southern and Eastern Europeans, and it is reasonable to assume that even where the theories themselves did not explicitly indict a specific group (e.g. Jews), the relationship between theory and popular negative stereotypes was mutually “beneficial”—i.e., the prejudice against certain groups made people more receptive to racial theories, while racial theories made popular prejudice seem “scientific” and more acceptable.

Probably the most active and influential eugenist in the 1920s was Dr. Harry H. Laughlin, who worked at the Eugenics Records Office at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.³ In the twenties, Laughlin researched the “immigrant stocks by nationality and specific type of defect—the feeble-minded, the insane, the criminalistic and the like.”⁴ Laughlin also served as an “expert eugenics agent” on the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on the request of its chairman, Albert Johnson.⁵

In a statement regarding the “biological aspects of immigration,” Laugh-

²King, *Making Americans*

³King, *Making Americans*. The Eugenics Record Office was established in 1910 on the initiative of Charles Davenport, one of the first eugenists in the U.S., who also became the office’s director. The initial funds were provided by Mary Harriman (the widow of E.H. Harriman, founder of the Union Pacific Railroad); in 1918, the financing passed to the Carnegie Institution of Washington. Laughlin, whose political activities on behalf of eugenics Davenport supported, became the superintendent of the new office (he had previously worked as an instructor in agricultural breeding at the Northeast Missouri State Normal School). See Allen, *Davenport*.

⁴Laughlin, quoted in King, *Making Americans*, p.173

⁵King, *Making Americans*; Higham, *Strangers*

lin explained that “[t]he character of a nation is determined primarily by its racial qualities; that is, by the hereditary physical, mental, and moral or temperamental traits of its people.”⁶ For this reason, he recommended that in regulating immigration the United States should conduct elaborate studies of the prospective immigrant in his home town, because that was the only place to get the “eugenical facts” and to ascertain that he and his “family stock” had “such physical, mental, and moral qualities” as should exist in America’s “future citizenry.”⁷ To emphasize the urgency of stock selection, Laughlin referred to the disproportionate numbers of foreign-born in insane asylums—this, first of all, cost the states money, and second, meant that the U.S. was receiving inferior stock which would corrupt the American race. This corruption, according to Laughlin, was inevitable because the birth rate was higher among the immigrants than among the native-born, and because it would be impossible to preserve racial purity, since “[w]herever two races come in contact, it is found that the women of the lower race are not, as a rule, adverse to intercourse with men of the higher.”⁸

Although Laughlin contended that immigrant selection was not principally a question of national origin but of verifying the eugenic qualifications of the individual immigrant, he went on to point out that the “lower or less progressive races” such as Mexicans appeared to furnish a disproportionate number of the inmates of prisons and institutions. Moreover, the distinc-

⁶Laughlin, *Statement*, p. 3

⁷Laughlin, *Statement*, pp. 3–4

⁸Laughlin, *Statement*. Laughlin was not the first one to call attention to the foreign-born in mental and other institutions; it had been a growing theme since 1900, although public alarm was aroused mainly as the result of the popularization of Laughlin’s research in the twenties (King, 2000). Among social scientists, the claim hadn’t gone unchallenged, however—for example, when Prescott F. Hall had made the argument regarding New York asylums in the early 1910s, H.L. Reed of Cornell University had pointed out that if adjusted for age and sex distribution, the percentage of foreign-born in insane asylums was 37 (against Hall’s claim of 48), not greatly higher than their percentage of the total population, which was 31. Reed, *Immigration*

tion between racial and family stock, while not exact in Laughlin's writings either, was even more blurred in the popular debate, and the general perception apparently was that "science" showed the new immigrants to have an undesirable biological heritage.⁹

Other eugenicists and sociologists supported Laughlin's line of argument, and were also more explicit on the question of the new immigrants' effect on the "American race." An important contribution to the anti-immigrant climate was made by Madison Grant, whose *Passing of the Great Race, Or the Racial Basis of European History*, published in 1916, was in vogue in the early 1920s.¹⁰ This book, which described the various racial types of Europe and the results of their interbreeding and settlement in the colonies, was to become the major source of inspiration to other writers elaborating on the danger of admitting "undesirables."¹¹

Grant, who was a lawyer by training but a naturalist by inclination, served as vice president of the Immigration Restriction League from 1922 until his death in 1937. His influence on immigration law did not stop at the theoretical or even the lobbying level, however: he also "used his legal skills to help write and pass the National Origins Act of 1924."¹² Unlike the Congressional advocates of restriction, Grant was not averse to describing some races as superior and others as inferior; according to him, the basic external yardstick of superiority was lightness of the hair, eye and skin color, although he combined this with such traits as stature and skull form. Drawing upon the concept of "survival of the fittest," Grant argued that since

⁹Laughlin, *Statement*; King, *Making Americans*

¹⁰Barrett and Roediger, *Inbetween Peoples*

¹¹King, *Making Americans*. Interestingly, the book remained relatively unknown through the war years, despite Grant's efforts to make it more applicable to the American situation by revising the racial status of Germans for a 1918 edition of the book, in which references to early American settlers as Teutonic were eliminated and modern-day Germans were defined as Alpine rather than Nordic. Higham, *Strangers*, p. 218.

¹²Cooke, *Grant*

“fittest” did not mean “best” but rather “the best suited for the environment,” if the truly best elements of the human race were to survive they would have to be separated from the lower races which tended to crowd them out by breeding more.¹³ Grant did not deny that in principle, different races could coexist: for example, he contended that “as long as they remain in the same relation to the whites as in the past, the negroes will be a valuable element in the community, but once raised to social equality their influence will be destructive to themselves and to the whites.”¹⁴ But he did argue that in practice the preservation of racial purity was impossible—and as he believed that interbreeding resulted in the domination of the “lowest and most primitive elements,”¹⁵ he considered it necessary to curtail the presence of those lower elements in the American society. This could be accomplished through restrictions on immigration and through controls on the reproduction of the “undesirable” members of the society (such as the insane, the deaf, and the lower classes in general).¹⁶

Grant also wrote the introduction to Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy*, which deplored the trend that was giving increasing power to the “yellow, brown, black and red” races in world politics. Although mostly focused on non-Europeans, Stoddard also discussed the “Alpine” and “Mediterranean elements” and warned that if the “Nordics” did not take care to protect their superior characteristics, the changed demands of the industrial world would bring the lower elements into prominence and result in the degeneration of the Nordic race.¹⁷ Stoddard also appeared before the House Committee on Immigration and

¹³Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*

¹⁴Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*, pp. 78–79

¹⁵Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*, p. 81

¹⁶Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*

¹⁷Stoddard, *Rising Tide*

Naturalization on a number of occasions. Like Laughlin, Stoddard supported the 1924 quota law which employed the 1890 census, characterizing it as a “great turning point in Americas national and racial destiny.”¹⁸ Stoddard combined his racial grounds for opposing immigration with a number of other standard arguments employed by restrictionists, such as the danger of a flood of immigrants unfriendly toward America and uninterested in American ideals.¹⁹

In a later book, *The Revolt Against Civilization: The Menace of the Under-Man* (1922), Stoddard elaborated on the danger that “lower elements” presented to the Western civilization of the Nordics. The opening phrases state the main argument succinctly:

The revolutionary unrest which to-day afflicts the entire world goes far deeper than is generally supposed. Its root-cause is not Russian Bolshevik propaganda, nor the late war, nor the French Revolution, but a process of racial impoverishment, which destroyed the great civilizations of the past and which threatens to destroy our own.²⁰

In other words, after having applied the biological interpretation to world politics in *The Rising Tide*, Stoddard now elaborated on the role of biology in the domestic politics of a nation. He argued that the progress of a civilization was limited by the racial qualifications of its bearers: as a people reached higher levels of civilization, complexity of life increased, and eventually the pressures created by this complexity would become too intense for the majority of the population, causing the civilization to founder. The heights a civilization could reach were, then, determined by the mental qualities of the race that propagated it: if that race degenerated either through the addition of “inferior stock” or through some process that favored the multiplication of the “lower elements” within the race itself, the point of

¹⁸Stoddard to Johnson, quoted in King, *Making Americans*, p. 192

¹⁹Stoddard, *Statement*

²⁰Stoddard, *Revolt*, p. v

foundering would of course be reached earlier.²¹

While Grant, too, had asserted that “[i]n many countries the existing classes represent races that were once distinct,”²² Stoddard took this idea one step further in coining the term “Under-Man,” which he defined as “the man who measured *under* the standards of capacity and adaptability imposed by the social order in which he lives.”²³ These “under-men” were, in other words, the ones who did not have “the capacity to keep pace” with the increasingly complex demands of civilization, and therefore could not be successful in that civilization. Not being successful, they became discontented and envious of those who, because of their greater mental abilities, could succeed. In time, this discontent and envy led to unrest and revolt as the “under-men” strove to destroy the achievements of the higher classes and force down the civilization to a level where they themselves could prosper.²⁴

This, then, was Stoddard’s explanation of the discontent prevalent in the society: far from being an indication of faults in the social order, it merely showed that a civilization had risen to such a high level that an ever greater portion of the population simply could not “keep pace.” Accordingly, Stoddard argued that while “reform of abuses may diminish the intensity of social discontent,” this was not an effective response in the long run, because the problem was not the society but those of its members who were “incorrigibly hostile to civilization.” Therefore, he recommended that rather than cling to the “emotional” and unscientific “doctrine of equality,” society should recognize the “iron law of inequality” and strive to promote the breeding of its “superior” members as well as limit the procreation of

²¹Stoddard, *Revolt*

²²Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*, p. 5

²³Stoddard, *Revolt*, p. 21; emphasis in original.

²⁴Stoddard, *Revolt*, pp. 20–22

the “inferiors.”²⁵

Such a view of societal unrest is especially interesting in the context of the fear and hatred that Congress displayed toward the new immigrants on account of their alleged tendencies to class consciousness and radicalism (see section 3.2.3). Stoddard’s explanation, by making radicalism the result of hereditary defects, not only reinforced the idea of “radical races”²⁶ but also reinterpreted radical tendencies among the *native* population in the light of biology. Workers’ demands reflected not defects in the society but defects in the workers themselves.²⁷ Stoddard supported his argument by presenting numerous tables of intelligence test results, grouped respectively by social status, national or geographical origin, and race. Predictably enough, these tables invariably showed that white, native-born Americans of high social status (as defined by occupation) were the most intelligent.²⁸ The fact that the highest social classes achieved the highest intelligence scores was not, according to Stoddard, a result of their better education or of other environmental factors; rather, it proved that “the dynamic urge of superior germ-plasm surmounts environmental barriers and raises the individual socially; while, conversely, inferior individuals tend to sink in the social scale.” This meant that the more advanced a civilization, the further this process would have advanced; hence the great differences in intelligence between classes were most visible in advanced societies such as the U.S.²⁹

²⁵Stoddard, *Revolt*, pp.23,30–31,222–223

²⁶See Higham, *Strangers*, p. 138

²⁷Stoddard wasn’t blind to the presence of members of other than the working class in radical movements. He explained that these upper or middle class persons were either “border-liners” whose capacities fell just below the requirements for success, “misguided superiors” who idealistically thought that society’s problems could be solved through revolt, or “innately capable” men who had been deprived of their “birth-right” to success through chance. Not having achieved success in “normal” ways, they compensated through acquiring leadership roles in radical organizations composed of their inferiors. Stoddard, *Revolt*, pp. 23–24

²⁸Stoddard, *Revolt*, pp. 59–67

²⁹Stoddard, *Revolt*, p. 72

While Stoddard was perhaps unusually categorical in assigning practically all of society's ills to the degeneration of its racial make-up, his views do provide an interesting perspective on the relationship between race/ethnicity and class. From its inception, eugenics had been not only a branch of science but a movement, and many eugenicists and other academics agreed with Stoddard's general proposition that man should take advantage of the "possibility of his own perfection by methods at once safe and sure" that eugenics provided.³⁰

There were other prominent academics who researched the impact of hereditary factors on society and who lent their weight to the cause of immigration restriction; these included such persons as sociologist Henry Pratt Fairchild, who published copiously in professional journals in the first quarter of the 20th century, and wrote more popular books as well.³¹

Despite the importance of these academics in affecting both public opinion and official policy, it should be noted that not all social scientists were convinced of the primacy of heredity in human affairs. Indeed, by the 1920s, the majority of articles that appeared in professional social science journals preferred the environmental perspective over the hereditary one. Nevertheless, the policy influence of social science tended toward restriction, as those social scientists whose articles appeared in popular magazines mostly favored the hereditary view.³² Several popular writers were also influenced by

³⁰Stoddard, *Revolt*. In addition to similar trends in the writings of other proponents of eugenics, such as Grant, Fairchild and Laughlin, the fact that Stoddard quotes at length from fairly numerous works expounding views similar to his own also indicates that the general bent his ideas were anything but unusual.

³¹Fairchild, *Melting-Pot*; see also Fairchild, *Literacy Test*; Fairchild, *Paradox*; Fairchild, *Immigrant Backgrounds*. It should be noted, however, that Fairchild's view of race appears to differ somewhat from those of Grant or Stoddard: in *Immigrant Backgrounds*, Fairchild seems to assign race with very little other function than that of group unity (which isn't clearly defined) and defines as purely cultural such elements of society as political organization, moral code, or arts. In *Paradox of Immigration*, however, he accepted the argument that native births declined as the result of immigration.

³²Satariano, *Immigration*. Satariano suggests a few possible reasons for the hereditary

the works of Grant and Stoddard, and articles on the general undesirability of Southern and Eastern Europeans abounded. These articles freely blended “scientific,” racial arguments with all manner of indictments, accusing the new immigrants of class thinking, low standards of living, bolshevism, clan-nishness, and “bad blood” with equal conviction. One of the most fervent publisher of anti-immigrant articles was the best-selling *Saturday Evening Post*, although it by no means held the monopoly of anti-immigrant articles.³³ *Collier's*, for example, published two articles on immigration by the advertising specialist George Creel. Creel reiterated the standard arguments (importance of homogeneity, unassimilability and bad racial character of new immigrants, etc.), but he also employed an unusually persuasive tone and provided his reader with a ready-made letter to send to Congress in order to “close the gates.”³⁴ The *New York Times* mostly kept to a more sedate line: while accepting that restriction in some form was necessary, it generally condemned discrimination in its editorials and in 1924 included a series of critical columns on the Johnson-Reed bill by Max J. Kohler, who had been active in opposing immigration restriction.³⁵

view's dominance in the popular press: restrictionist articles may have been specifically solicited, the younger and less established proponents of the environmentalist view may have been less inclined to expose themselves to status loss through publishing in popular magazines, etc.

³³King, *Making Americans*; see also e.g. *Saturday Evening Post*, February 12, 1921, March 4, 1922, May 5 and December 8, 1923, September 6, 1924; *Collier's*, July 1, 1922 and May 17, 1924. On the Post's later attitude to Mexican immigration, see Mohl, *Saturday Evening Post*.

³⁴Creel, *Close the Gates!*; Creel, *Melting Pot or Dumping Ground?*. Besides being an advertising man, Creel had directed the Committee of Public Information, the World War I propaganda agency, and therefore was an influential person. Through the CPI he had also been involved in wartime Americanization. See Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, pp. 41, 65–66.

³⁵Kohler had previously cooperated with Louis Marshall of the American Jewish Committee in opposing restriction but had in 1921 decided that “a brief temporary legislative curtailment of immigration [...] might be in order” Leonard, *Louis Marshall*. Kohler remained opposed to the 1890 quota basis; his columns appeared in the *NYT* on e.g. Jan 5, Jan 7 and Jan 24, 1924.. Editorials on the Johnson-Reed bill in the *NYT* appeared on e.g. Feb 9, Feb 17, Feb 26, Apr 24, and Apr 27, 1924. While the *NYT* had been opposed to the 1890 quota basis as discriminatory, it contended that there was “merit

4.1.2 Patricians, Patriots and Klansmen: Organizations in Support of Restriction

While the restrictionist social scientists and race theorists were effective lobbyists in their own right, a number of organizations shared their general cause and were active in publicizing it. Some of these organizations, such as the Immigration Restriction League of Boston (see section 2.3.1) and another, New York –based organization by the same name, had immigration restriction as their main agenda, while other associations of a more general nature contented themselves with endorsing proposed restrictive legislation and passing blanket resolutions calling for restriction.³⁶

Like popular magazines, the associations interested in immigration restriction facilitated the spreading of the notion that Southern and Eastern immigrants had been “scientifically” proved inferior (or more generally, that the 1920s immigration legislation was solidly based on science). Most of these associations, in relying on science to support their prejudice against Southern and Eastern Europeans, were more interested in drawing broad conclusions that condemned the new immigrants than in understanding or critically examining the work of the eugenisists. This meant that although scientists could be challenged in professional journals on the specifics of their studies, the effect of these challenges on the agenda of immigration restriction was very limited: the details of the debate rarely reached the popular magazines, and the associations promoting restriction tended to refer to

in the proposal” of calculating quotas based on the “racial and national origins” of the whole population, because “it is both natural and wise that the American race wishes to preserve its unity and does not care to see the present blend greatly changed.” (Editorial on April 4, 1924).

³⁶It should be noted that to some extent, the membership roster of the restrictionist organizations, especially that of the Immigration Restriction League of Boston, read like a list of the nations prominent eugenists; in other words, the pressure exerted by such groups was not entirely separate from the lobbying activities of individual eugenists.

science in a manner vague enough to be practically unassailable.

An example of the imprecise character of allusions to science is provided by Francis H. Kinnicutt's statement to the House Immigration and Naturalization Committee. Kinnicutt represented the New York Immigration Restriction League, which, he said, had an active membership of 20,000. Kinnicutt explained that his organization advocated "a certain reasonable adjustment of certain racial lines," and opposed basing the quotas on naturalization figures because "there's nothing scientific in that"—instead, he and his association endorsed the principle of using the 1890 census as the quota basis, though he did not explain what made this more scientific.³⁷

Similarly, a number of patriotic societies endorsed restriction, often referring in vague ways to the "racial differences" between old and new immigrants. For example, Mr. Dwight Braman, president of the Allied Patriotic Societies, appeared before the Senate committee to speak in favor of the 1890 quota basis, which he said would prevent the further entry of people who were "widely divergent in their racial qualities from the races which were settled here before."³⁸ The American Legion, too, supported restriction. Although the Legion was primarily organized to protect the interests of war veterans, it also had a deep interest in opposing all kinds of subversion; fear of Bolshevism was the main factor in the Legion's opposition to immigration, although immigrants' alleged disloyalty during the war and the problem of unemployment also played a role.³⁹ The Patriotic Order Sons

³⁷Kinnicutt, *Statement*. Kinnicutt also wished Mexican immigration to be put under the quotas because Mexicans, obviously, were even less assimilable than Southern and Eastern Europeans.

³⁸Braman, *Statement*, p. 74

³⁹Lax and Pencak, *Creating the American Legion*; Baker, *American Legion*, pp. 26–30, 51–58. The Legion also lent explicit support for Japanese exclusion (see *NYT*, Mar 12, 1924), although its stand on the racial issue in general was not emphatic, and Goldberg notes that some of its chapters had joined the opposition to the Ku Klux Klan because these chapters' "definition of 100 percent Americanism did not exclude African Americans, Catholics, or Jews" Goldberg, *Discontented America*, p. 132.

of America went somewhat further, sending a representative to the House Immigration Committee hearings to speak for restriction; the representative mostly framed his arguments in terms of the immigrants' radicalism and their propensity to commit serious crimes, and presented the resolution of his organization which called for deportation of dangerous enemy aliens and the suspension of immigration for two years, as well as the continuing of Asiatic exclusion policies and further restriction "by numerical limitation of nationalities according to percentage aliens naturalized."⁴⁰ Similarly, the Daughters of the American Revolution (which had also been active in the Americanization movement) responded favorably to restriction, including the use of the 1890 census as a quota basis.⁴¹

Another popular organization emphatically supportive of immigration restriction but not focused exclusively on it was the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, "revived" in Georgia in 1915 by William Simmons, had by the early twenties become a significant social force. During this period the Klan was, as one historian puts it, a "many-splintered thing,"⁴² each chapter adjusting its focus to fit the interests of the community where it functioned. Nevertheless, anti-immigrant agitation, and especially anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism, were crucial facets of the Klan appeal. Standard Klan rhetoric reviewed the gamut of traditional anti-Catholicism, reiterating the arguments that Catholics bowed to a foreign power and plotted to gain full control of America in order to destroy American political freedom and democracy. The attack on Jews was at least as virulent, condemning Jewish political and economic influence. Very often Catholics and Jews were also lumped together in claims that heretic and un-American forces were "taking over"

⁴⁰Patten, *Statement*

⁴¹*NYT*, April 19, 1924.

⁴²Miller, *The Ku Klux Klan*, p. 215

and threatening the country. New immigrants, being largely non-Protestant and having a reputation for labor radicalism, were an important target of Klan hatred.⁴³

Although many condemned the Klan both during its heyday and after its post-1924 decline, it carried a reasonably respectable public image in the early twenties. The Knights of a city or town commonly represented a fair cross-section of its economic make-up: only the unskilled and the elites were underrepresented. This provides something of an index of the acceptability of open anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic sentiment, and indicates that such sentiment wasn't confined to the less educated classes. This is not to deny that only a small minority of members engaged in violent vigilante activities, or that the Klan occasionally defined bootleggers and corrupted politicians, rather than Jews and Catholics, as the primary threat. The Klan's flexibility and its skill to zero in on the questions that most interested the community in which it operated were of momentous importance to its growth. Nevertheless, intolerance toward non-Protestants was proclaimed by the Imperial Wizard and other high officials forcefully enough to make it more than probable that even when these issues were not the main concern of a specific chapter, they were at least tacitly accepted.⁴⁴

Another indication of the acceptability of anti-Semitic sentiment at the time is the practice of restricting Jewish college attendance, either explicitly or through less obvious methods (like selective admission policies which included questions about religious affiliation and/or required students to submit photographs with their applications). After World War One, these policies became prevalent at several American universities, including such prestigious institutions as Harvard and Columbia; often, they were directed

⁴³Jackson, *KKK*; Horowitz, *Klansman*; Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*

⁴⁴Jackson, *KKK*; Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*

at Jews of Southern and Eastern European, rather than German, background. Moreover, contemporary surveys of student attitudes indicated a high level of prejudice against Jews (as well as against other ethnic, racial or religious groups).⁴⁵

There are, then, indications that while derogatory references to Jews and Catholics were practically absent from the Congressional debate, this did not mean an absence of hostile sentiment in general. Open hostility was just not politically expedient: anti-Semitic statements, especially by public persons, consistently aroused vocal protest. For example, in April 1921 the Secretary of State Charles Hughes submitted to Congress an immigration report which indicated that prospective immigrants were largely composed of “Jews of an undesirable type” as well as other slum dwellers. The front-page *New York Times* story on the report, headlined “Hughes Asks Rigid Immigration Ban,” caused a great stir and prompted Hughes to deny that he had given any opinion on immigrants and explain that he had merely transmitted requested consular reports to the House Immigration Committee.⁴⁶ Similarly, the president of Harvard University, Abbot Lawrence Lowell, who had openly condoned restricting Jewish admission, was severely criticized for his views.⁴⁷

Other racist statements regarding Europeans often called forth protests as well, although it appears that the response was more powerful when the statements were made against Jews; Jewish organizations were also among the most active in opposing the quota laws, probably further diminishing the willingness of restrictionists to provide them with additional proof of discriminative intent. Another possible factor contributing to the scarcity of

⁴⁵Wechsler, *Rationale for Restriction*; Lewis, *Parallels and Divergences*

⁴⁶*NYT*, April 20 and 21, 1921.

⁴⁷Wechsler, *Rationale for Restriction*, p. 651.

direct anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic statements in the debate is that, unlike the vague “Southern and Eastern Europeans” or even vaguer “immigrants of a lower type,” terms like “Jew” and “Catholic” indicted a specific group or individual. This meant that the person who had made the statement would, in case of opposition by members of that group, have much less leeway in arguing that he really meant somebody else.⁴⁸

4.2 Societal Groups and Restriction

As is clear from the Congressional debates as well, race or the new immigrants’ character in general weren’t the only grounds for supporting restriction. Indeed, one of the most intriguing (and perhaps most confusing) aspects of the 1920s immigration legislation is the sheer volume of restrictionist sentiment coming from different quarters of the society. Often, too, the groups that united in supporting restriction were ones that otherwise had conflicting interests. Immigration restriction seemed to be the one issue that could receive the backing of eugenists as well as black leaders, Boston patricians and populist organizations, manufacturers and labor organizers. Arguments against immigrants could be advanced from widely divergent perspectives, so restriction seemed to bring some good for everyone and take little away from anyone (except, of course, from immigrants themselves).

The major opposition to any kind of limitations on immigration had traditionally come from business, for obvious reasons: the greater the supply of labor, the lower the wages. In the 1920s, too, most industrialists were against restriction, and indeed all of the representatives of industry who

⁴⁸The strategy of speaking against a group while excepting specific members of that group was often employed in Congress on the subject of Southern and Eastern European immigrants; there were, after all, several congressmen of Southern or Eastern European descent, which forced even the most stringent nativists to at least pay lip service to the possibility that inferior races could occasionally produce superior individuals.

appeared before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization spoke in opposition to the quota laws.⁴⁹ The major business organizations that voiced their dissatisfaction at the prospect of restriction included the National Association of Manufacturers and the Inter-Racial Council, an organization representing “hundreds of the largest industrial corporations in the country,” which had sprung from the Americanization movement under the guidance of Frances Kellor.⁵⁰

The opposition of business was still formidable—but not as vigorous as it had been: industry, having been a major actor in the Americanization movement, was itself beginning to feel nagging doubts about the stability of a society which received hundreds of thousands of new members yearly. And, though the idea of aliens as synonymous with radicals (and vice versa) had served industry well in the battle against labor organizing, there was a kernel of truth in the equation, and some were beginning to wonder whether pro-business propaganda and Americanization programs were sufficient to check the impulse toward radicalism. Similarly, while businessmen benefited from the labor provided by immigrants, they were by no means immune to the racist view of Southern and Eastern Europeans that was gaining popularity in the twenties. And perhaps most important of all, the profits of the war years had been quite satisfactory, despite nearly non-existent immigration: machinery was increasingly employed to accomplish the tasks that had formerly been the responsibility of unskilled workers—the labor group that immigration mostly provided.⁵¹

In the late teens and the early twenties representatives of business occasionally sounded a somewhat more favorable note toward restriction. For ex-

⁴⁹Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*

⁵⁰Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*, p. 153

⁵¹Montgomery, *Fall*; Vittoz, *World War I*

ample, Richard H. Edmonds, the editor of the *Manufacturer's Record* stated that he regretted that manufacturers were “thinking of their present needs instead of studying more deeply the evils which would come to the country in the future through increased immigration from southern Europe.”⁵² C. Coapes Brinley, a sales engineer, argued that the solution to the labor problem was not “letting down the bars to the unskilled, uneducated hordes of southeastern Europe”—instead, manufacturers should make more efficient use of machinery. Brinley went on to say that the use of machinery had other benefits, namely that “money invested in American machinery would go into American homes” and that machinery would provide “a permanent solution of the problem now confronting the American manufacturer,” the unreliability of labor. Unlike the worker, “[m]achinery ‘stays put.’ It does not go out on strike, it cannot decide to go to Europe, or take a job in the next town.”⁵³

Although “business interest” is often used as if all manufacturers had the same needs, in the 1920s the positions of different industries regarding the need for labor were very different. Industry representatives often opposed the Quota Acts, but they did not necessarily oppose restriction as such: major industrial journals pointed out that restricting immigration was perfectly acceptable and even necessary, and their main concern was to ensure that it was carried out in such a form as to secure employers’ access to additional foreign labor if an unusual need for it should arise. This was, in fact, carried out in the final version of the 1924 Quota Act, both through allowing immigration from the Western Hemisphere and through giving the Congress discretion in adjusting the 150,000 quota ceiling of the national origins plan

⁵²Edmonds, *Restriction*, p. 323

⁵³Brinley, *Shall We Let Down the Bars*, pp.70–72

in the case of an “abrupt or seriously disturbing” need for labor.⁵⁴

In a logical contrast to business, organized labor had usually pressed for increased regulation of immigration, and continued to do so in the 1920s. However, despite the fact that immigration represented competition in the labor market, workers’ support of immigration restriction was neither complete nor unproblematic. The American Federation of Labor, for example, had in its early years held a fairly strong immigrant constituency, and had in the 1880s actually recognized two official languages, English and German.⁵⁵ However, as the AFL was focused on skilled labor, it had little interest in the new immigrants, most of whom worked in unskilled occupations. The AFL’s strategy was to focus on bread-and-butter issues rather than on far-reaching change, and to portray itself as the bulwark against revolution and socialism; this tallied with the Federation’s support for immigration restriction. The decision to support restriction, first made in the 1890s, originated with the leadership and encountered significant resistance among the rank and file members: Samuel Gompers’ proposal to support the literacy test was in fact defeated at the 1896 AFL convention, though it was adopted the next year after heated debate.⁵⁶ In the unfavorable atmosphere of the early twenties, the AFL emphasized its conservative nature even more intensively, and as Southern and Eastern Europeans were increasingly associated with radicalism, legislation against the new immigrants was a logical stance not only from an economic but from a political standpoint as well.⁵⁷

Other representatives of organized labor, such as the Industrial Workers

⁵⁴Vittoz, *World War I*, pp. 76, 77–78.

⁵⁵Dinnerstein et al., *Natives and Strangers*, p. 93.

⁵⁶Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*, p. 111. The arguments against restriction at these conventions, according to Calavita, flowed from the members’ conviction that the “men of wealth” were a worse menace than the immigrant and that the immigrants were good unionists.

⁵⁷Montgomery, *Fall*, pp. 5–7; see also Wallace, *Statement*; Green, *The AFL and the Middle Way*.

of the World and the Socialist Party, tended to have more sympathy for the new immigrants and were critical of the racism displayed by the New England elites and the AFL leadership.⁵⁸ However, the anti-labor tone of the early twenties that had heightened the conservative impulse within the AFL had nearly demolished these more radical organizations, and in the public debate the AFL represented the voice of labor.

Although the AFL occasionally embraced the racist rhetoric employed by other restrictionists, its main emphasis was on economic aspects; it wasn't especially fervent in its advocacy of restriction in the 1920s, partly because the issue was already promoted by so many other groups and partly because many of the representatives and senators the AFL had endorsed in the 1922 election were adamantly opposed to the quota acts.⁵⁹

Both labor and business, then, displayed a fair degree of ambivalence toward immigrants during this period, although both still held on to their traditional lines. In a sense, it may seem curious that in this business-friendly era, the immigration question was seemingly resolved in favor of labor. But as industry was no longer united on the question, mounting an effective campaign was difficult. As the quota laws did not apply to the Western Hemisphere, this preserved a "revolving door" which could let in an additional supply of workers during times of labor shortage; also, black migration to the North revived with the economic upturn in 1923, softening the impact of the drop in immigration that had resulted from the temporary 1921 legislation.⁶⁰

The same reason that had traditionally prompted labor to wish for fewer

⁵⁸Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law*

⁵⁹Montgomery, *Fall*, p. 462

⁶⁰Goldberg, *Discontented America*, pp. 155–157. Gompers had, in fact, tried to persuade Albert Johnson to incorporate Mexican and Canadian labor, too, in the quota plan, but Johnson insisted that the bill would never pass in such a form. Levenstein, *AFL and Mexican Immigration*.

immigrants—economic competition—was also instrumental in creating black support for restriction. When immigration had plummeted during the war, the position of blacks in industry had improved significantly. Still, blacks understood that little fundamental had changed, and feared that once immigration revived they would again be pushed to the bottom rung. Many black papers therefore supported the various suspension measures proposed immediately after the war, arguing that the war had shown how important a hindrance immigrant labor had been to the advancement of black Americans.⁶¹

While the economic argument for restriction was the one most employed by blacks, many also shared white Americans' fears that the new immigrants would imperil American institutions. But they did not call for limits on Southern and Eastern Europeans specifically, as this would have implied acceptance of race theories. But blacks did resent the fact that whites preferred immigrants over native, English-speaking blacks; the tendency of immigrants to quickly adopt American race attitudes did not escape them, either. Moreover, the xenophobia of the Red Scare had its impact on blacks as well, inducing some to advocate that blacks should actively portray themselves as 100 percent Americans in an effort to gain acceptance. Some also believed that the concurrent race-inspired violence was instigated by aliens, leading them to hope that whites, too, would see that condoning attacks on non-whites fostered general lawlessness.

The majority of blacks hoped for stringent limitations on immigration so that their own opportunities would increase, but they also wished that the limitations would be on an individual rather than a group basis. Black newspapers and leaders also spoke fervently against the Japanese exclusion clause

⁶¹Hellwig, *Black Leaders*

of the 1924 Act (earlier anti-Asian measures had also prompted black opposition). The economic argument, however, tended to outweigh the distaste for the racial implications of the quotas, and by 1924 most black newspapers supported the Johnson-Reed bill.⁶²

Farmers, like industrialists, were divided on the question of immigration: they wondered whether they could do without the extra labor, but also shared the nation's fears that immigrants would imperil the nation's future in ways that made economic considerations seem beside the point. It wasn't clear, either, that immigration would in any case help agriculture, as most new immigrants stayed in the cities and as increased production wasn't necessarily the solution to farmers' problems. These concerns were extensively voiced in the Congressional debate over immigration, and rural Congressmen proposed various plans for diverting the immigrant stream to agricultural areas, arguing that farm life would Americanize the newcomers and thereby solve the problem of immigrant ghettos while benefiting the rural areas which were the "backbone of America."⁶³

According to Wang, Southern agrarians in particular (represented chiefly by the American Farm Bureau Federation) emphasized the need for more farm labor; their Midwestern counterparts were more suspicious of the suitability of the new immigrants for farm labor, or for American life in general.⁶⁴ Interestingly, Southern congressmen were among the most vocal in demanding restriction, although many certainly did request that immigrants headed for the farm be treated differently from others. The question was finally solved by giving "bona fide farmers" preference within the quotas of

⁶²Hellwig, *Black Leaders*; see also Goldberg, *Discontented America*; Barrett and Roediger, *Inbetween Peoples*

⁶³*Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, pp. 225-232, 3454-3455; *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 65, , pp. 6522-6528; Wang, *Farmers*

⁶⁴Wang, *Farmers*, p. 649

the 1924 Act; more dramatic schemes like requiring immigrants to stay on a farm for a number of years after arrival were opposed because of their implications of indentured servitude and their impracticality. However, the willingness of many to accept the immigrant so long as he didn't stay in the congested cities indicates that the disapproval of the immigrant wasn't as solidly based on his racial characteristics as is sometimes assumed, and makes it rather difficult to clearly differentiate between generally derogatory attitudes and actual belief in the new immigrants' hereditary inferiority.

The debate in the larger society reflected the issues discussed in Congress, although it had a slightly different emphasis and produced somewhat cruder rhetoric. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan used older, familiar stereotypes to incite fear and hatred against the new immigrants, while eugenicists strove to establish the framing of immigration policy in terms of race and heredity as a scientific project untainted by emotions. In the popular magazines and in the activities of various anti-immigration groups, however, these two interpretations of immigrant undesirability blended relatively freely, and it is difficult to gauge accurately the effect that eugenic theories had on the general public or on the political debate. It seems likely that the major effect of scientific racism was to make older prejudices and stereotypes seem more respectable and logical, rather than replace them with a new view of race. This is evident in the question of assimilability: it was far from unusual for a writer or a speaker to both contend that Southern and Eastern Europeans were unassimilable because of their hereditary traits, and yet accuse them of not *wanting* to become "real" Americans and assimilate into the society. In other words, asserting that "science" had shown new immigrants to be incapable of becoming good citizens did not preclude charging them with

unwillingness to do so.

Despite the growth of hereditary theories, then, the line between culture and race was by no means clearly drawn—popular anti-immigrant feeling, while utilizing science, was not limited by it. Furthermore, the restrictionist project received support even from groups that were either indifferent or hostile to race theories: the traditional economic interpretation of immigration had not lost its importance entirely, and groups (such as blacks and labor organizers) that didn't necessarily see the immigrant as a racial threat nevertheless often worried about his economic impact. The claim that immigration led to lower wages and thereby diminished the American standard of living was also employed by Congressional restrictionists, although economic arguments on behalf of immigrants could easily be countered by referring to the broader dangers that an unchecked flow of newcomers would engender.

The economic question was also easily connected to the fear of immigrant radicalism, which (like most of the perceived shortcomings of immigrants) could be connected just as easily to race as to cultural and historical factors. Stoddard was probably the most emphatic in his equation of societal discontent with bad hereditary qualities, but other writers echoed his ideas in a somewhat less lucid form, and anarchism was often referred to as a “blood disease” both inside Congress and outside it. Many groups and writers considered the immigrants' un-Americanism—manifested in their radicalism, clannishness, and disloyalty—to be of primary importance: whether this un-Americanism was the result of culture or heredity, it did not bode well for America.

Chapter 5

The Context of the Quota Acts

5.1 Immigration Legislation in Other Countries

United States, although unique in the scale of immigration, was not the only country drafting and implementing immigration legislation around the turn of the 20th century. Other countries of high immigration, such as Canada and Australia, were also debating the impact that immigration had on their economies and on the level of cohesion in the society. European states, too, were moving to stricter and more formal control of entry and naturalization.

The questions facing countries of high immigration were, of course, very different from those that most European states were concerned with. Moreover, European states ranged from those that had only a handful of foreign residents (like Sweden) to those that were home to a significant number of adopted citizens (like Great Britain). It is therefore no surprise that while the debates and the legislative measures adopted by countries like the U.S., Canada, or Australia had much in common, legislation in European coun-

tries not only differed from that of countries of high immigration but also showed considerable variation from one European state to another. Nevertheless, several European countries did adopt and consolidate legislation concerning immigrants in the early years of the twentieth century, emphasizing the growing importance of state control and state bureaucracy in the Western world.

5.1.1 Countries of High Immigration: Canada, Australia, and Latin America

Excluding Asians

In the United States, the issue of Asian immigration had been to a great extent treated as a question separate from general immigration controls. This practice was repeated in Canada and Australia: excluding Asians was not seen as incompatible with permitting or even encouraging European immigration. South Africa and a few Latin American countries pursued similar policies as well, although to a more limited extent.

The decision of the U.S. to exclude the Chinese and, later, other Asians, had a clear impact on the legislation adopted by other immigration countries, as the migrants who could no longer enter the U.S. sought other destinations. However, the impact was practical rather than ideological—in other words, the perception that Asians could and should not blend into white societies was not confined to the U.S., and the American laws merely provided a catalyst to legislative action that would off the threat of greater Asian immigration.

In response to the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Canada passed a Chinese Immigration Law in 1885, requiring all entering Chinese to pay a head tax of fifty dollars and restricting the number of Chinese a vessel could

bring to one per fifty tons.¹ Like its American counterpart, this law was passed after the transcontinental railroad, which had employed by far the greatest part of Chinese immigrants, had been completed. As Elizabeth Clifford notes, the completion of the railroad was significant not only because it removed the opposition of railroad magnates to Chinese exclusion, but also because it made the “Chinese problem” one of national rather than regional character. West Coast residents in both Canada and the U.S. had long complained that the Easterners disregarded the question of Chinese immigrants because they thought it didn’t concern them. Now, however, the Chinese had both the motive—unemployment—and the means—the railroad—to migrate to the East Coast as well.²

Between 1905 and 1925, Canada strengthened the restrictive measures directed at Asians with such measures as the Continuous Journey Act in 1908, directed at East Indians, and the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, which admitted only very few narrowly defined classes of Chinese, and practically ended Chinese immigration. Finally, in 1930, the immigration of all Asiatics (with very few exceptions) was expressly forbidden.³

The fact that British subjects were not exempted from any of the Asiatic exclusion laws and that e.g. “Chinese” was defined in law as a question of descent rather than of nationality emphasizes the special importance of race in the question of Asian immigration. Indeed, one scholar noted in 1934 that “[f]or the purposes of Canadian immigration law, mankind is divided into two classes: the first comprises those who are of Chinese origin and descent;

¹British subjects were not exempted in the law, but diplomats and their “suite and servants” were. If the law was breached, penalties fell not only on the Chinese person but on the master and the owner of the ship as well. Lee, *Anti-Chinese Legislation in British America*, p. 359.

²Clifford, *Racing the Nation*, pp. 69–70.

³Clifford, *Racing the Nation*, pp. 92–94; Plender, *International Migration Law*, p. 50.

the second those who are not of Chinese origin and descent.”⁴

Essentially the same division between Asians and non-Asians (or more broadly, non-whites and whites) existed in Australian immigration law. The earliest legislation to curb Chinese settlement was enacted in colonial times: in 1855 the Victorian parliament imposed a limit on the number of Chinese per tonnage a vessel could bring, as well as an entrance fee of £10, for which the vessel’s captain was responsible. Within a few years of this, South Australia and New South Wales instituted similar laws. However, the reduction in Chinese immigration caused by the legislation and by economic factors made the issue less pressing, and by 1867 these laws had been repealed.⁵

Ten years later, Chinese immigrants once again became the the subject of parliamentary discussions, and Queensland restricted the entry of Chinese to its newly-discovered gold fields through entry fees and limitations on mining permits to Asians and Africans. In the 1880s, most of the other colonies reinstated or introduced restrictive legislation, and by the 1888 Intercolonial Conference the question had obviously become one of national importance. The resolutions adopted at the conference aimed at uniform laws regarding immigration, and most colonies acted on the recommendations that only one Chinese be allowed to land from a ship per five hundred tons of the ship’s registered tonnage, and that Chinese should not be allowed to enter a Colony by land without a permit. At the 1896 Intercolonial Conference, it was resolved that these restrictions should be extended to all non-white races, including British subjects.⁶

When the Commonwealth was founded, the principle of “White Australia” was therefore well entrenched. The Immigration Restriction Act of

⁴Descent and origin were determined solely by the male line. Angus, *Canadian Immigration*, p. 76.

⁵Ryan, *Immigration*, p. 472.

⁶Ryan, *Immigration*, pp. 472–473.

1901 instituted this principle through a provision that required each immigrant to be able to write down from dictation a passage of fifty words in a European language; while this provision was ostensibly non-discriminatory, the debates surrounding it made clear that the intention was to exclude all non-European immigrants. At the protests of Japan the wording of the provision was in 1905 amended from “European language” to “any prescribed language,” although the operation of the law did not substantially change. The act fulfilled its exclusionary purpose fairly effectively. The only problem was constituted by the Kanaka labor traffic from the Indian subcontinent, which the Australian Government after 1904 dealt with by simply refusing to issue the required entry permits.⁷

During all this time (with the exception of periods of economic distress) immigration from Europe and especially Britain was encouraged and even subsidized. As sea fare to Australia was expensive compared to the cost of traveling to the U.S. or Canada, various free or assisted passage schemes for specified classes of immigrants were introduced by the colonies. Mechanics, farm laborers and domestic servants, especially, were recruited, and European immigrants who paid for their own passage received compensation in the form of subsidized land.⁸ As was admitted by a number of U.S. legislators as well, the fundamental question wasn’t how many immigrants arrived, but what those immigrants were like culturally and racially. In its explicit focus on the whiteness of the population, the Australian debate resembles the sentiments expressed on the American West Coast, where the main focus had traditionally been on Asian rather than European immigrants. Although Australia’s proximity to Asian countries prompted it to phrase its legislation in less racial terms than the U.S. had done, the rhetoric sur-

⁷Ryan, *Immigration*, pp. 473–475; Plender, *International Migration Law*, pp. 48–49.

⁸Ryan, *Immigration*, pp. 474–475.

rounding the laws quite directly declared that “the vision of the Australian continent peopled entirely with a white race is magnificent. The turning of the vision into reality is the ambition of all Australians.”⁹

In addition to Canada and Australia, a number of Latin American countries enacted specific restrictions on “non-European” races. These policies were not widespread and their role in the countries’ general politics was much more limited than in Canada or Australia. What is significant about them is that they often were explicitly directed at non-European *races* rather than nationalities: for example, Costa Rica in 1914 prohibited the entry of “gipsies of any nationality,” and Ecuador in 1909 refused to admit a Chinese laborer of U.S. nationality.¹⁰

The “Asian question” was also current in South African politics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sugar plantations developed in the mid-19th century in the province of Natal required laborers, and as the local blacks proved unwilling to do the work, the plantation-owners turned their hopes to importing Indians to serve as indentured workers. An agreement was negotiated with the government of India, providing that the imported workers should be indentured for a period of five years, during which they were to be furnished with acceptable food and housing and a set monthly pay. At the end of five years, they were free to stay if they chose; after ten years in South Africa they could receive free passage back to India, although they also had the option of staying.¹¹

The plan did not work exactly as the plantation-owners had hoped, however. There were repeated complaints of mistreatment from the Indian laborers, resulting in threats by the Indian government to end the agreement.

⁹Quoted in Duckworth, *White Australia*, p. 434.

¹⁰Plender, *International Migration Law*, p. 54.

¹¹Taft and Robbins, *International Migrations*, pp. 339–340; Huttenback, *Indians in South Africa*.

And, at the end of their servitude, the laborers sometimes turned to pursuits other than the agricultural labor or domestic service that the proponents of the plan had envisioned as their role. Even more alarmingly, a number of free Indians (mostly Muslims) immigrated at their own expense and engaged in commerce, provoking complaints of unfair competition from white merchants. Another significant factor in the increasing opposition in Natal to the immigration of Indians was that the Indian population of that province rapidly outstripped the Europeans. Consequently, the *Natal Mercury*, which in the early years of the program had deemed it “the vitalizing principle” of prosperity in Natal, was by 1895 ready to declare the “[t]he evils attendant upon the immigration of coolies, their low standard of living and morals, the introduction by them of disease [...] are too generally appreciated to leave room for contradiction.”¹²

As is apparent from the comment by *Natal Mercury*, the arguments used against Indians in South Africa were very similar to those used against Asians everywhere: low hygiene and living standards, corrupt morals, and the accompanying element of unfair competition with whites. As had other countries, South Africa took it for granted that Asians could not be accorded the same rights as whites: their proper role in white societies (if any) was that of temporary cheap labor. Accordingly, several municipal and national laws limiting the rights of Indians were enacted, including the 1913 Immigrants’ Regulation Act that contained a dictation test similar to the one instituted by Australia in 1901: the test, like that of Australia, was to be administered in a European language. The test provision was bolstered by a clause that any immigrant could be barred “on account of standard or habits of life [...] unsuited to the requirements of the Union,” effectively

¹²Quoted in Huttenback, *Indians in South Africa*, p. 274–275.

ending Indian immigration.¹³

Attitudes Toward European Immigrants

Compared to the United States, Canada's immigration policy regarding Europeans was consistently somewhat more liberal, and in some aspects differed greatly. For example, whereas the United States discouraged and even forbade explicit recruitment of immigrants, the Canadian government focused on trying to influence the composition of the immigrant flow through selective recruitment.

The factors underlying the different policies of the two countries were economic rather than social; that is, public sentiment in Canada was largely worried about the same issues as in the United States, but Canada's immigration policy was defined by its need for settlers and farm workers to populate the West (and thereby make the newly built Canadian Pacific Railroad profitable). Canada therefore aggressively recruited farmers with promises of cheap or free land, and in the early years of the century by far the strongest emphasis in policy was on the agricultural abilities of the prospective immigrant.¹⁴

The immigration policy conducted at the turn of the 20th century by the minister of the interior, Clifford Sifton, favored what Sifton called "the stalwart peasants" from central Europe. Sifton contrasted these newcomers favorably with urban workers from the English slums, who knew little or nothing about farming. But in the minds of many Canadians, immigrants from countries like Austria, Russia, or Romania, however good farmers they might be, represented a threat to the cultural and political unity of the

¹³Quoted in Huttenback, *Indians in South Africa*, pp. 289–290; see also Taft and Robbins, *International Migrations*.

¹⁴Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, pp. 59–65

emerging country, and many insisted that ethnic and cultural considerations should come before economic ones. This, of course, echoes the similar sentiments expressed in the United States. Nevertheless, the practice of recruiting these immigrants as farmers gave these misgivings a slightly different flavor than they had in the United States. In Canada, the frontier was not yet closed, and the reality of the need for rural population and the policies that expressly promoted the immigration of “bona fide farmers” to some extent prevented the connection between Southern and Eastern Europeans and urban overcrowding that was so important in the American immigration debate.¹⁵

Another American theme repeated in the Canadian debate was the allegedly higher percentage of criminality and insanity among the immigrants. But here, too, the comparison between “British slum-dwellers” and “sturdy peasants,” which had to a degree prevented the singling out of Southern and Eastern Europeans as the offending group, caused the debate to focus less on race and more on the individual immigrant. Accordingly, the preferred solution to the problem of crime and insanity was to tighten the medical and psychiatric inspection of immigrants on arrival. Eugenics was a factor in Canada as well, although it, too, apparently centered more on individuals than ethnic groups.¹⁶

Despite these differences, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe clearly aroused widespread suspicion. Sifton’s successor as minister of the interior, Frank Oliver, began to promote the idea that the immigrant’s ethnic qualifications should take precedence over his occupational abilities, and openly argued that the most desirable immigrants were those from Britain and the United States, regardless of whether they hailed from

¹⁵Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, pp. 59–77; Clifford, *Racing the Nation*.

¹⁶Dowbiggin, *Keeping This Young Country Sane*.

urban or rural areas. However, the Immigration Act of 1906, drafted under Oliver's direction, made no reference to an immigrant's nationality. This was somewhat compensated by using the Act's expanded categories of prohibited immigrants to "influence the the racial makeup of the immigrant stream."¹⁷

The Immigration Act of 1906 marked the end of free entry to Canada: it consolidated previous immigration legislation, increased the number of excluded classes, and gave official sanction to deportation of undesirable immigrants. The subsequent Immigration Act of 1910 further expanded the prohibited categories, added a clause allowing deportation on the grounds of political or moral instability, and "conferred on the cabinet virtually unlimited discretionary powers allowing it to issue orders-in-council to regulate the volume, ethnic origin, or occupational composition" of the immigrants.¹⁸ As was often the case in American debate as well, the main point of contention was whether the economic benefits of immigration outweighed consideration of the ethnic and cultural makeup of the nation. There was, however, a fairly strong consensus on the need to separate "the wheat from the chaff," and the debate did not wax heated around either law.¹⁹

The First World War led to considerable anti-foreign and especially anti-German sentiment in Canada, and was followed by a Red Scare similar to that in the United States. An Immigration Act passed in 1919 increased the restrictions on entry and included both a literacy provision and a clause providing for the deportation of all persons who "by word or act in Canada

¹⁷The excluded classes in Canadian law were largely the same as in the U.S., covering cases like persons with contagious diseases, lunatics, prostitutes, and destitute immigrants. Before 1906, however, Canada did allow many of the classes prohibited on account of mental or physical disabilities or lack of means to enter if they were part of an immigrant family or if they had sufficient funds posted on their behalf. Clifford, *Racing the Nation*, p. 95; Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, pp. 77–80.

¹⁸Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, p. 80.

¹⁹Quoted in Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, pp. 81.

seeks to over throw by force or violence” the government of Canada or the United Kingdom, or “is a member of or affiliated with any organization entertaining or teaching disbelief in or opposition to organized government.”²⁰ This last part of the Act reflected the emphasis on immigrants’ role in labor radicalism, also seen in the U.S.

Despite its concerns over the impact of immigration, Canada did not enact legislation aimed at reducing the total number of immigrants in this period. Instead, the need for labor led Canadians to anticipate the postwar immigration boom with optimism rather than fear. The American Quota Acts, too, only further intensified Canada’s recruitment policies to counter the effect of more and more Canadians and immigrants to Canada moving south of the border in search of more lucrative employment.²¹

In Australia, another country focused on recruiting immigrants, the policies mirrored those of Canada in many ways. Concern over Southern and Eastern Europeans was expressed in Australia as well, and recruitment was heavily focused on Britain, Scotland and Ireland, emphasizing the desire to “keep above 90 per cent of the proportion of Australia’s stock of British origin.”²² After the passage of the U.S. quota laws, Australia amended the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 to allow “the Governor-General by Proclamation to prohibit or impose quotas for the immigration of aliens of any specified nationality, race, class or occupation where he deemed it desirable” to do so for economic or social reasons. The provision was never used, however; instead, immigration was regulated through recruitment and British diplomatic channels.²³

Restrictive tendencies were also apparent in some Latin American coun-

²⁰Quoted in Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, pp. 81.

²¹Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*.

²²Taft and Robbins, *International Migrations*, p. 347.

²³Ryan, *Immigration*, p. 475.

tries, especially Argentina and Chile. The upper classes of these countries were concerned about immigration in approximately the same ways and at the same time as their counterparts in the United States: beginning in the 1890s, immigrants were used to explain “such varied problems as pauperism, crime, labor unrest, and anarchism.”²⁴ Again as in the U.S., this posed a conflict between the belief in the economic necessity of immigration and the fear of its social impact. And similarly, blaming labor unrest, poverty, and social discontent on immigration furnished a way of evading examination of the more fundamental causes these problems might have, and created an atmosphere suspicious of social reform movements. Solberg notes that the contentions that immigrants furnished a large proportion of paupers or that they were especially prone to crime had little statistical support; indeed, these claims were often contradicted by statistics. Nevertheless, the practice of blaming immigrants for these phenomena continued, and also acquired racial characteristics: “by 1905 sociologists were beginning to uphold the Argentine creole as racially superior to several immigrant groups, including the Italians and the Spaniards.” The immigrants’ biological inferiority, they argued, accounted for their allegedly greater propensity to commit crime and for their involvement in prostitution and the white slave trade.²⁵

Both Argentina and Chile had for the previous half-century encouraged immigration, and both had a tradition of giving equal rights to foreigners and citizens. The turmoil and militant labor organizing in the early 20th century, however, led many to question the wisdom of such policies, and the first laws that specifically targeted foreigners were responses to these concerns: Argentina passed a Residence Law in 1902 after a “huge anarchist-

²⁴Solberg, *Immigration and Urban Social Problems*, p. 215.

²⁵Solberg, *Immigration and Urban Social Problems*, p. 221, 223–225.

led general strike at the height of the harvest season”²⁶ and Chile did the same in 1918, probably prompted by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. These laws stipulated that foreigners who had been condemned of crimes, who “preached violent social or political change,” or whose conduct the president believed dangerous, could be expelled.²⁷

Some upper-class Chilean and Argentine observers called for strict curtailment of all immigration, but in both countries the economic demand for immigrants (especially agricultural workers and settlers) was too strong to be overpowered by fears of social unrest or theories of race, and the gates remained open. The same was true for the vast majority of Latin American countries, and when restrictions existed they nearly always had an economic rationale (Brazil, for example, restricted immigration significantly in the 1920s, apparently in an effort to alleviate unemployment).²⁸

5.1.2 European States and Immigration

Most European countries have traditionally been countries of emigration, not immigration, and the issues regarding the entry of foreigners are therefore naturally very different from those faced by countries like the U.S. or Australia. Nevertheless, European states, too, consolidated and tightened their policies toward foreigners in the early twentieth century.

Of the European countries, the situation of Great Britain was probably the one most similar to the United States in regard to immigration: although principally a country of emigration, Britain also had an immigrant population in some ways parallel to that of the United States. This was partly due to the British empirical ideology, which (at least officially) stressed the

²⁶Solberg, *Immigration and Urban Social Problems*, p. 228.

²⁷Solberg, *Immigration and Urban Social Problems*, pp. 227, 229.

²⁸Solberg, *Immigration and Urban Social Problems*; Fields, *Closing Immigration Throughout the World*, p. 689.

equality of all Commonwealth subjects, and partly the result of Britain's role as the leading industrial nation and its concomitant laissez-faire policy in trade and migration.²⁹

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, significant numbers of Jews, fleeing the pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, arrived in Britain. This provoked bitter resentment among British workers fearing for their jobs, as well as apprehensions on the part of middle- and upper-class citizens about the "quality" of these immigrants.³⁰ The complaints against the Jewish newcomers paralleled the objections to the "new immigrants" in the U.S.: politicians and the press warned that the aliens were destitute and therefore a burden to society, that their habits and background induced them to live in unsanitary and crowded conditions, and that they were prone to crime. Again, statistical evidence for these claims was rather tenuous. London's East End, where most of the newcomers went, was certainly crowded, but as some observers pointed out, so were several districts that housed mostly native-born Britons. A similar argument could be made regarding the aliens receipt of poor relief. And, as Herbert Samuel pointed out, it was true that aliens were responsible for a disproportionate amount of crimes, but not necessarily in quite the manner that most people assumed:

[T]he percentage of persons sentenced to prison is no less than three times as great among the aliens as it is among the general population; recently the proportion has been rapidly increasing. It is noteworthy that Americans, who are only one-tenth of the alien population, contribute one-fourth of its crime; the Russians and Poles, who comprise a third of the alien population, contribute only one-sixth of its crime.³¹

The agitation against the newcomers led to the Aliens Immigration Act of 1905, which "forbade entry to people who could not support themselves and their dependents, to people whose infirmities were likely to make them a

²⁹Huttenback, *Indians in South Africa*; Layton-Henry, *Great Britain*.

³⁰Layton-Henry, *Great Britain*, pp. 90, 98–99; Pellew, *Home Office*.

³¹Samuel, *Immigration*, p. 326.

charge on the rates, and also to some known criminals.”³² The administration of the law was lax, however: it had been passed by a Conservative government, and the succeeding Liberal government was not enthusiastic about the measure. Moreover, the administration fell to the Home Office, which had traditionally only been concerned with immigrants from the viewpoint of political stability, and in recent years had focused largely on anarchists. It had little interest in the general problems of immigration, and had assumed that if restrictive measures were to be passed, their administration would fall on the Board of Trade or the Local Government Board.³³

The First World War brought much stricter controls on the entry of foreigners. Two days after the war broke out, the Home Secretary introduced the Aliens Restriction Bill, which “enabled the King in Council to make Orders to prohibit or restrict the landing or embarkation of aliens, Orders to deport aliens, to require them to live in specified areas, to make them comply with any provisions as to registration.”³⁴ The Bill passed in all of its stages on the day of its introduction, and was applied immediately. Though passed as a temporary wartime measure directed primarily against spies, the main provisions of the Aliens Restriction Act remained in force through amendment in 1919, and it was the main policy instrument regarding aliens until superseded by a new Aliens Order in 1953.³⁵

As Richard Plender notes, the First World War caused marked changes in immigration laws throughout Europe. Apart from specifically restrictive legislation, the war had an important role in consolidating the previously limited passport system for international travel, facilitating the tracking of entries and departures and bringing travel under stricter administrative

³²Layton-Henry, *Great Britain*, p. 90.

³³Pellew, *Home Office*, pp. 370–371.

³⁴Plender, *International Migration Law*, p. 58.

³⁵Plender, *International Migration Law*.

control. Many countries also enacted laws to either restrict or at least control the entry of aliens. This was true even of countries that had a very low proportion of foreigners: for example, Sweden enacted a Deportation Act in 1914, which allowed the government to impose a regulative system in times of emergency; in 1927, this was replaced by the more comprehensive Aliens Act, meant to be temporary but extended several times and made permanent in 1954.³⁶

The different internal economic and social situations that the European countries were faced with meant that their policies toward immigrants varied significantly in the postwar years. For example, in order to facilitate postwar reconstruction and alleviate its population shortage, France encouraged immigration in the 1920s, while Switzerland worried about the population's growing heterogeneity and tried to induce its foreigners to become naturalized.³⁷ However, immigration was not a significant enough question for any of these countries for them to embark on strict restrictive legislation: rather, they were content to merely consolidate their administrative control over the entrants, passing various measures designed to control and occasionally limit aliens' residence and employment. Most countries did, however, deny entry to destitute aliens, and the Depression of the thirties further tightened the controls in this respect. The economic plight of the thirties also induced some countries (e.g. France) to encourage aliens to return home, although these attempts were usually less than successful.³⁸

³⁶Plender, *International Migration Law*; Hammar, *Sweden*, pp. 17–18, 26.

³⁷For the same reason—population shortage—the eugenics debate in France focused much more on encouraging “proper” kinds of reproduction than on weeding out undesirable elements. See Schneider, *Toward the Improvement*.

³⁸Verbunt, *France*; Hoffmann-Nowotny, *Switzerland*; Plender, *International Migration Law*.

By the early thirties most Western countries had put an end to the *laissez-faire* immigration policy that had characterized the latter part of the previous century. Everywhere, the concerns over immigration were in many respects very similar to those that U.S. observers were voicing. Especially the hostility toward Asian immigrants, displayed in most countries simultaneously with efforts to encourage European immigration, replicates similar attitudes in the U.S.

In regard to European immigrants, too, the question of the ethnic and cultural composition of the nation often caused heated debate. As in the United States, the ethnic arguments were both buttressed and complicated by explaining social discontent, crime, and labor unrest with the influx of aliens and alien ideologies.

Not surprisingly, these concerns were most salient in countries of high immigration. In Europe, claims of immigrant criminality certainly contributed to the popularity of restrictive laws, but they played a much smaller role. The main thrust behind the tighter administration of entry and residence was provided by broad factors such as the growing trend toward bureaucratization and economic protectionism, and by more specific developments such as the First World War and the Great Depression of the thirties.

Despite the similarity of concerns in other countries of immigration to those in the United States, only the U.S. instituted definite and strict restrictions on European immigrants. Canada, Australia, and Latin American countries did introduce new regulations, but they also continued to recruit immigrants from what they deemed to be desirable sources.

The greatest reason for this discrepancy is probably economical. In the United States, fertile land was no longer readily available, the use of machinery had diminished the need for labor, and rapid population growth

was no longer perceived to be an absolute requirement to prosperity—on the contrary, slums, urban overcrowding, and the resulting social unrest indicated that more population might represent a threat to wealth and economic growth. In contrast, Canada, Australia, and Latin America all had considerable tracts of untilled land, and their growing industries and developing infrastructures needed laborers. It seems, therefore, that the role that long-term economic factors played in the American decision to limit immigration were more significant than would appear from the debate regarding restriction.

5.2 The Domestic Context

The brief review of the international immigration policies in section 5.1 indicates that both European states and countries of high immigration brought immigration under stricter control in this period, rejecting their earlier laissez-faire policies. On the other hand, none of the countries of high immigration curbed entry as dramatically as did the United States.

The international trend toward growing control of immigration reflected the rise of the modern, bureaucratic state as much as economic or nationalistic impulses. In the United States, too, the processes of urbanization and specialization fashioned the country into an increasingly complex, impersonal society, while at the same time the innovations in transportation and communication both speeded this development and welded the country ever more tightly into a national unit.

The growth of organization and bureaucracy in the United States was apparent on several fronts in the first quarter of the 20th century. Corporations were bringing more and more specialized functions under one managerial umbrella, universities were being transformed into “eclectic centers

directed by professional administrators,” workers, industrialists, and farmers all occupied themselves with the question of promoting their interests through organization, and voluntary organizations of all shapes and sizes cluttered the landscape. Increasingly, too, the organizational drive was a regional or national, rather than a local one.³⁹

The same trend toward organization also characterized the state. An array of new federal agencies—the Federal Reserve Board, the Federal Trade Commission, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, etc.—signaled not only that ever more numerous aspects of life had to be dealt with bureaucratically, but also that, more than before, they had to be dealt with nationally. In addition to this horizontal expansion, there was also a new sense of continuity and permanence over time, as “[a]gencies accumulated their files and procedures and precedents” and the federal and state governments engaged in long-term cooperative projects such as highway construction.⁴⁰

Mobilizing the society for war, while not without its problems, had been a surprisingly smooth and successful, revealing how far the orientation toward organization had progressed. The necessary organization of the war years, while largely composed of voluntary and semi-voluntary associations, also cemented the development of an integrated national society, and “a bureaucratic orientation now defined a basic part of the nation’s discourse.”⁴¹

The growing emphasis on systematic administration was apparent in immigration policy as well. Immigration had come under federal control in 1882, and between that time and the 1920s the body of regulations had grown significantly, if haltingly. In the debate over the bill that was to become the permanent 1924 Act, many congressmen argued that a more

³⁹Wiebe, *Search for Order*, pp. 294–295.

⁴⁰Wiebe, *Search for Order*, p. 295.

⁴¹Wiebe, *Search for Order*, pp. 293, 295.

efficient bureaucratic machinery was needed to replace the haphazard checks made on Ellis Island, and the Immigration Act of 1924 instituted consular inspection abroad for all prospective European immigrants. Moreover, the scientific tone of the racial anti-immigrant arguments advanced by eugenicists connected immigration restriction to a broader trend of emphasizing the importance of groups or institutions rather than individuals and objective methods rather than moralistic penalties or persuasion. In his book *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, Paul Boyer notes that by the end of the 19th century, reformers were shifting from appeals to the individual's moral conscience to an "emphasis on the reformers' technical expertise and superior factual grasp of urban issues." This trend accelerated in the Progressive Era: as muckrakers "marshaled facts, statistics, dates, and names" and "stroved for a tone of objective expertise," vices like "intemperance and sexual deviation came to be viewed less as personal failings than as products of an urban environment that needed to be purified—by force of law if necessary."⁴² A parallel to immigration restriction is apparent: from barring immigrants only on account of a personal failing (like being a criminal or a prostitute or having an infectious disease) the United States had gradually moved toward treating immigrants in broader categories (those who could and could not read), and finally instituted strict quotas based on ideas about the racial worth of various national groups.⁴³ The immigrant current, and by extension the American population, was to be "purified" of undesirable elements with objective, impersonal methods, devised and wielded by experts in the science of race.

In conjunction with the progressively greater administrative regulation of

⁴²Boyer, *Urban Masses*, pp. 198–199.

⁴³Of course, this account did not apply to Asians, who had been treated as a group rather than as individuals at least since the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882.

immigration, economic changes allowed critics of immigration to re-evaluate the role of immigration in the economy.

Economy seems to have been the crucial reason why other countries of high immigration, although they displayed concern over the effect of high-volume immigration on the cultural and political cohesion of the society, refrained from limiting entry on the same scale as the United States. Unlike Canada, Australia, or Latin American countries, the United States no longer had a significant need for agricultural settlers or unskilled workers to complete major infrastructural projects. There was little pressure to increase the population: gone were the days when a growing population was necessary to push the frontier westward or inhabit and till large unoccupied (or Indian-occupied) tracts of land. On the contrary, many people worried that the cities were becoming overcrowded, and although rhetoric had it that more people should live on the farm, in an era of persistent agricultural crisis this was not economically feasible. As a number of congressional representatives pointed out, the main problem facing farmers was not lack of agricultural labor but the declining prices of farm products and overproduction.⁴⁴

Another factor driving immigration, the need for unskilled labor, had also declined drastically. Many great infrastructural projects, like the trans-continental railroad, had been completed, and the spread of mechanization had eliminated many previous occupations. Such technological innovations not only meant greater production capacity per worker, but resulted in improved communications, allowing companies to distribute their products faster and in greater volumes. Expanding markets created a need for more effective and better coordinated administration of production, marketing, and sales, favoring large corporations that could handle all these aspects

⁴⁴Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*; Boyer, *Urban Masses*; *Congr. Rec.*, vol. 60, pp. 227–228, 4550; vol. 65, pp. 6524–6525.

efficiently. As Alfred D. Chandler has pointed out, these administrative changes created a whole new class of white-collar workers—the managers—while simultaneously reducing further the need for unskilled laborers through coordination and concentration of production.⁴⁵

The trend toward centralization and mechanization accelerated during the First World War. Immigration from Europe was all but halted by the war, inducing employers to intensify the focus on capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive forms of production. As a result, “between 1919 and 1929 horsepower per worker in manufacturing increased by nearly 50 percent, compared to a gain of only 15 percent during the previous decade.” Even more significantly, although the years between 1919 and 1928 witnessed a nearly “50 percent increase in aggregate production, overall factory employment actually declined by 6 percent.”⁴⁶

More than before, then, capital-intensive industrial production dominated over agriculture and traditional labor-intensive processes. This meant that immigration was no longer a prerequisite for prosperity, and by the early twenties even business leaders, traditionally uncompromising in their support of unlimited immigration, were reconsidering their stance on restriction. Immigration might prevent a shortage of labor and thereby help keep wages low, but it was a tool difficult to wield: although the volume of immigration followed the demand for labor, it did not do so without delay. This meant that when demand for labor rose there was a brief shortage, and when it fell off, unemployed immigrant workers constituted a threat to social stability. In addition, relying on immigrant workers meant that external circumstances could abruptly reduce the labor pool, as had happened

⁴⁵Chandler, *Visible Hand*; Maddison, *Dynamic Forces*, chapter 3 and pp. 40–45.

⁴⁶Vittoz, *World War I*, pp. 64–65.

during the war.⁴⁷

As these structural changes in the industry were taking place, workers, manufacturers and politicians contended over the question of how industrial relations should be managed. From the beginnings of the industrial society in the 1870s to the Second World War, “fierce debates and struggles concerning the equitable division of national income and wealth generated intense political heat.”⁴⁸ In this context, it is interesting to note the way in which the ethnic feeling against Southern and Eastern Europeans intertwined with class feeling. Many of the arguments that were advanced against the new immigrants could be interpreted in terms of class as easily as in terms of race: the new immigrants were accused of having a low standard of living, congregating in urban ghettos, etc. Even more significantly, restrictionists claimed that new immigrants “naturally” thought in terms of class, and warned that they would also infect American workers with their class allegiance and anarchism.

The concern over class allegiance reflected the fundamental ideological question in the struggle between labor and business: whether collective action was the correct way to respond to the challenges facing workers in the modern, industrial society. Individualism was in many senses at the heart of American culture, and unions smacked unnervingly of the kind of class society that Americans liked to think that the New World, with its opportunities and egalitarianism, had escaped.⁴⁹

This insistence on individualism and hostility to movements that were based on class interests seems to give a new meaning to the vilification of the new immigrants because of their working class attributes and sympa-

⁴⁷Vittoz, *World War I*.

⁴⁸Dubofsky, *State and Labor*, pp. 234–235.

⁴⁹Dubofsky, *State and Labor*, p. 235–236.

thies. Unwilling to see their society in terms of class, many Americans found it appealing to cast the problem in a more familiar mold: that of foreign influence and race. Moreover, some eugenisists also tried to make the question of class biological in a broader sense, arguing that inferior hereditary material was at the root of a person's failure to climb up the social ladder and advocating the easy availability of birth control as a means to reduce the reproductive rate of the lower classes.⁵⁰

In a sense, focusing on the immigrant provided a way of preserving the ideals of social mobility and individualism in the face of growing industrial discord. As the Lynds pointed out in their classic study *Middletown* (and as many scholars have shown since), even in the context of the famed prosperity of the twenties, social mobility was hardly a reality for most workers. The lives of most laborers in Middletown were much more dominated by the fear of lay-offs than the hope of promotion. But among the middle and upper classes of Middletown, the belief persisted that a worker's unemployment or lack of success was primarily due to his laziness.⁵¹

In the 1920s, the question of class interest was largely (if temporarily) shelved, and the new consensus sounded by representatives of industry, the Secretary of Labor, and AFL leaders was that "[m]anagement and worker are nowadays coming to realize that they are really partners."⁵² At the same time, the steady growth of the labor movement made an about-face. The proportion of the civilian workforce belonging to unions, having reached an unprecedented high of 12 percent in 1920, dropped dramatically between 1921 and 1923, and then steadily declined throughout the decade (it did not

⁵⁰McLaren, *History of Contraception*; Vaile, *Statement*; Dennett, *Statement*. For a fuller discussion on eugenics, see section 4.1.1.

⁵¹Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*.

⁵²Davis, *Address*, p. 1.

begin growing again until 1934).⁵³

This decline in membership coincided with a growing spirit of conformity in the rhetoric and tactics employed by the unions, especially the American Federation of Labor. Struggling to keep a respectable image in the aftermath of the Red Scare, the AFL increasingly portrayed itself as a bulwark against Communism and a responsible partner in the “business of America.”⁵⁴

The victory of the anti-immigrant forces, then, came about at very much the same time as the lengthy and heated struggle over industrial control was, for the moment, resolved in favor of capital. This does not mean that immigration restriction was primarily backed by business: indeed, the American Federation of Labor supported the Quota Acts, whereas the attitude of business representatives was more ambiguous (see section 4.2). But economic developments certainly had removed a good many of the reasons behind industry’s traditional opposition of restriction, and the generally business-friendly and anti-union climate made the immigrants’ working class characteristics a heavy argument against them. Politicians could, and did, hold up immigration restriction as a sign of their goodwill toward American workers. The Republican administrations of Harding and Coolidge, unwilling to intervene in any way in behalf of labor and having little sympathy for unions, felt a need to mollify working class voters and prevent them from contrasting the Republican administrations too unfavorably with the preceding, more labor-friendly politics of the Wilson administration. Immigration restriction, along with the tariff, was useful in this project. And by giving each worker better opportunities through decreasing the labor pool, rather than by giving greater rights to labor as a whole, immigration restriction

⁵³Bernstein, *The Growth of American Unions*, table on p. 303.

⁵⁴Montgomery, *Fall*.

emphasized the individualistic approach to industrial relations.⁵⁵

The societal changes wrought by the rapid economic and bureaucratic developments since the late 19th century provoked both fear and excitement in Americans. In the 1920s, technological advances—especially those in transportation and consumer goods—were largely welcomed; in some cases, as with the Model T Ford, welcomed with enthusiasm. But other changes, such as the growing immigrant population and urbanization, were viewed with an ample dose of apprehension.

Contemporary observers often interpreted the conflicts of the decade in terms of urban modernism and rural resistance to change: they saw phenomena like fundamentalism, Prohibition, immigration restriction and the Ku Klux Klan as the projects of reactionary forces trying to preserve a Victorian, traditional America. But as later interpretations have made clear, few of the major issues of the decade allow themselves to be interpreted in easy polarities: the Ku Klux Klan drew much of its support from the urban middle class, support for immigration restriction could be found among widely different groups in the society, etc. And in many cases, political expediency, party affiliation, and self-interest—in short, day-to-day politics—complicated the question of urban versus rural interests.

This is not to say that rural, traditional forces were not significant in building support for e.g. immigration restriction and Prohibition. In an attempt to gauge the importance of the urban-rural thesis, Charles Eagles examined the distribution of House immigration votes between urban and rural representatives on four roll calls in 1920 and 1924. Eagles found that simply dividing the votes of representatives between those from rural areas and those from urban ones (using the 1920 census definition of “urban” as a

⁵⁵Dubofsky, *State and Labor*.

town with a population of 2,500 or more) shows some support for the urban-rural thesis: rural representatives were more likely to support immigration restriction than their urban counterparts. An even greater disagreement existed between representatives from metropolitan areas and representatives from extremely rural regions (Congressional districts where more than 80 percent of the population lived in “unincorporated areas or in towns of fewer than 2,500”). Eagles also examined four Prohibition votes in the House between 1917 and 1929 and found the same pattern, although Republicans showed more metro–most-rural disagreement on Prohibition than they had on the immigration bill.⁵⁶

Similarly, some issues commonly labeled as “reactionary” did in fact have common bases of support. Support for Prohibition came largely from the same sources as support for immigration restriction. In a study of Congressional voting patterns, Eileen McDonagh found that “prohibition voting is highly associated with immigration voting”—i.e., those who voted for Prohibition also tended to vote for immigration restriction and vice versa.⁵⁷ This pattern tallies with other research regarding Prohibition and immigration restriction support: the saloon was often depicted as an institution of the foreign-born, and weighty opposition to Prohibition came from immigrants, especially Germans. Anti-Catholicism, a strong factor in nativism both before and during the twenties, was also often linked to a favorable attitude to temperance or even Prohibition, as Catholics were often perceived as a

⁵⁶Eagles, *Congressional Voting*.

⁵⁷McDonagh, *Significance of the Nineteenth Amendment*, pp. 72–73.

The immigration restriction votes in McDonagh’s study are not the Quota Acts but votes associated with the passage of the 1917 Act; however, it is reasonable to assume that the issue connections would have persisted the few years between the passage of that act and the 1921 and 1924 Quota Acts. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the 1917 Act was not by far as drastic in its discriminatory intent or effect regarding Europeans. McDonagh’s results can therefore not be taken as an absolute guide to connections between ethnic prejudice against the new immigrants and Prohibition support, although they do support the general perception that an association between the two existed.

group especially fond of the saloon and drink.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, neither Eagles' nor McDonagh's study lends unqualified support to a simplistic polarity between so-called traditionalist and modern forces. Eagles found that if the roll call votes are divided not only along urban-rural lines but along party lines as well, the picture becomes more complex: the urban-rural split within the Democratic party was very strong, while "Republicans failed to divide significantly along traditional urban-rural lines, or even along the more specific metro-most-rural lines."⁵⁹ Similarly, McDonagh found that voting on woman suffrage was unrelated to voting on immigration restriction.⁶⁰ The significance of this absence of connection is uncertain and slight, as historians have not commonly argued that such a connection could be expected. Inasmuch as woman suffrage nevertheless represented a major change (and a change whose immediate effects were often overestimated by contemporary observers), it does emphasize the difficulty in drawing clear lines of "traditional" versus "modern" interests.

The question of woman suffrage also illustrates the way in which practical considerations rather than broad themes like "traditionalism" steered the support for different issues. Woman suffrage was, in the minds of many, closely associated with Prohibition: voluntary organizations advocating temperance and even prohibition were perhaps the most prominent political activity (apart from suffragism) that women were engaged in, and some suffragists also explicitly promoted woman suffrage as a means to achieve Prohibition. Many who supported woman suffrage, then, may have done so less out of concern for women's rights than out of a belief that giving women the vote would be the downfall of the saloon.⁶¹

⁵⁸Higham, *Strangers*.

⁵⁹Eagles, *Congressional Voting*, p. 532.

⁶⁰McDonagh, *Significance of the Nineteenth Amendment*.

⁶¹See e.g. Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, pp. 125–127. While the connections between the

The conflicting responses that the various aspects of “modernity” aroused in Americans, as well as the way in which practical politics often overrode the broader urban–rural or traditional–modern dichotomies, indicate that the significance of the question of traditionalism lay perhaps more in its contemporary appeal than in its objective reality. The ideal of a Jeffersonian, agricultural society was a forceful bastion in American thought, and the fact that immigrants no longer seemed to adopt it made them suspect. Neither belief in this ideal nor the suspicion against immigrants was limited to rural dwellers but was shared by many urban Americans as well.

That immigrants tended to be urban also associated them more strongly with “urban” vices like crime, prostitution, and drinking. While this association was probably the strongest in the United States, it was also evident in other countries, especially Argentina and Great Britain (see section 5.1). And like many complaints about immigrants, it served a dual purpose as an argument against immigration and an explanation of domestic social problems.

While it certainly was in part a genuine response to the rapid pace of change, the emphasis on tradition and on the glory of rural America can also be connected to the growing importance of the national state. The period from roughly 1870 to the First World War witnessed the growth of a tendency to think in terms of nations and the proliferation of invented traditions that bolstered the appeal to a national, rather than local or regional, loyalty.⁶² Many Western states were finding it increasingly necessary to interfere with the lives of their subjects; they were also faced with the fact that those subjects were now in many cases citizens whose political opinions

temperance and woman suffrage movements are well-documented, McDonagh interestingly found no connection between Congressional voting on woman suffrage and on Prohibition. On the basis of her voting pattern studies, McDonagh argues that woman suffrage is, in fact, more properly characterized as a civil rights issue than as an issue related to expediency and status consistency issues.

⁶²Hobsbawm, *Mass-Producing Traditions*, p. 263.

had to be taken into account. As a result,

the state, seen from above in the perspective of its formal rulers or dominant groups, raised unprecedented problems of how to maintain or even establish the obedience, loyalty and cooperation of its subjects or members, or its own legitimacy in their eyes.⁶³

The processes of urbanization and industrialization undermined many of the relationships that had previously sustained the social order, and the establishment of loyalty had to be accomplished on a mass scale. As a response to these problems, “rulers and middle-class observers rediscovered the importance of ‘irrational’ elements in the maintenance of the social fabric” and turned to ritual, ceremony, and tradition as ways of emphasizing national unity and a sense of common purpose.⁶⁴

In the United States, heavy immigration made national unity an acute question, and as immigrants became more numerous and the society more national in orientation, the assumption that immigrants more or less spontaneously “became” Americans was traded in for the idea that Americans had to be “made,” a project that took on an increasingly formal character around the time of the First World War (see section 2.3.2.) In this project, as well as in the 1920s restriction debate, “traditional” American ideals, as well as the role of tradition itself, held a central position, even though they were rarely strictly defined.

Since being an American was not so much a question of ancestry as of choice, ideals and beliefs were central to American nationalism. This meant that the immigrants’ tendency to live in urban areas was not seen as a mere practical problem—rather, it also represented a lack of proper appreciation for rural life as a central American ideal. Similarly, the alleged radicalism of immigrants was perceived both as a threat to the social order and as

⁶³Hobsbawm, *Mass-Producing Traditions*, p. 265.

⁶⁴Hobsbawm, *Mass-Producing Traditions*, p. 268.

a rejection of the fundamental American tenets of individual opportunity and absence of class interest. For immigrants, these associations meant a less hospitable climate; for natives, they gave an “internal enemy” against which to define their identity as “good Americans.”⁶⁵ And for the society as a whole, the specter of “un-Americanism” meant a stricter demand of conformity to a narrower view of American identity.

The debate on immigration restriction tended to employ rhetoric that was both ideology-heavy and emotional. Not surprisingly, however, more pragmatic and tangible considerations also affected the success of immigration restriction in the 1920s. Long-term economic and bureaucratic developments had both made strict regulation and control of immigration feasible and even, perhaps, desirable; the diminished need for unskilled labor had, if not removed, at least blunted business opposition. For politicians, supporting immigration restriction was a way of emphasizing their commitment to “American values” and to the welfare of the American worker as well as their staunch disapproval of “un-Americanism” in the form of alien customs, class allegiance, and radicalism.

⁶⁵Hobsbawm, *Mass-Producing Traditions*, p. 280.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The debate on the Quota Acts, in covering issues from economics to culture and from race to political ideology, indicates the significance of the place that immigration held in American thought. Few of the accusations leveled at the immigrants during the debate were entirely new: allegations of alien disloyalty and radicalism had surfaced as early as the late 18th century, religious hatreds had influenced attitudes toward immigrants throughout the 19th, and claims that the “quality” of immigration had sunk had been made in turn with regard to each new group of arrivals. Racism, though, had not previously been applied to Europeans, although the idea of Anglo-Saxon superiority was hardly a novelty.

What was new in the 1920s, however, was that all these strands of nativism seemed to surface simultaneously and from several quarters. Popular groups like the Ku Klux Klan condemned the new immigrants for their religious heresy, patriotic organizations declared that they were disloyal and subversive, representatives of labor wished to restrict their entry to keep wages high, eugenists claimed that they would destroy America’s racial heritage, and all were united in saying that American culture and American

institutions were at risk if the tide of immigration could not be stemmed.

The diminished opposition (and in some cases direct support) of industry contributed to the political power that these various strains of anti-immigrant sentiment achieved. Finding themselves both affected by the cultural and racial arguments against immigrants and less in need of new labor, representatives of industry no longer united in clamoring for immigrant workers. Machines had taken over many of the jobs previously performed by unskilled immigrant laborers, and centralized management further reduced the need for workers. Machines were also more reliable: they did not strike, nor was their availability suddenly cut off by external factors like wars. The significance of this reduced need for labor, as well as of the closing of the frontier, is highlighted by the fact that while many other countries of high immigration also worried about the impact of immigration on their societies, none of them instituted restrictions as strict as those of the United States—largely because they *did* need the labor and the agricultural settlers.

Despite their rather limited role in the debate itself, economic factors were significant in bringing about immigration restriction. But although some groups (most notably labor organizations and black leaders) advocated restriction mainly out of economic self-interest, racism and considerations of national unity were what decided the shape that restrictive legislation took.

In the minds of many, the new immigrants targeted by the Quota Acts were closely associated with radicalism and labor unrest. This equation was largely accomplished through the Americanization movement, which had strong sponsors in the business community. Although the point of this equation was to stem labor organizing, not immigration, it had a powerful impact on the anti-immigrant climate in the 1920s. The racial theories advanced by eugenists like Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard and Harry

H. Laughlin further reinforced the connection between new immigrants and bolshevism by presenting social classes (and many other societal problems) as the result of biological rather than environmental factors. These theories also undermined the faith in ultimate assimilation that had characterized the Americanization movement: obviously, if biology was the key, no amount of education or opportunity would make good citizens out of the strange newcomers.

This theoretical, “scientific” racism intermingled in the popular press and in the Congressional debates with older prejudices and stereotypes. Few of the arguments against Southern and Eastern European immigrants were purely racial; rather, the advocates of restriction freely blended the racial arguments with claims about the new immigrants’ low standard of living, radicalism, and general unassimilability. The same was true of some of the arguments against Japanese immigrants; here, however, race was clearly the primary factor, and practically no one questioned the desirability of stopping Japanese immigration. The widely different attitudes that the U.S. adopted toward Asian and European immigrants were also reflected in the immigration policies of other countries: Canada, Australia and South Africa all barred the immigration of Asians though they continued to encourage the immigration of Europeans.

On the whole, the debate over the Quota Acts embodied, and strangely reconciled, many of the conflicting aspects of the 1920s. Eugenists and some congressmen emphasized America’s need for an efficient immigration policy based on the most recent theories of science, while popular organizations and other congressmen chose the immigrants’ unreceptiveness to traditional American ideals and values as their main argument. Still others focused on

the religious or economic undesirability of the immigrant. Racism, in both its popular and scientific guises, could be almost seamlessly integrated into all of these, and “Americanism,” that watchword of the day, backed up not only the restrictionist argument but the demand for social cohesion that it represented.

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